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A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers

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Edited by
Staf Hellemans
Peter Jonkers

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INTRODUCTION

THE CONTINGENT MEETING OF A CATHOLIC MINORITY CHURCH WITH SEEKERS

STAF HELLEMANS and PETER JONKERS

It cannot be denied that the Catholic Church – like the other main churches in the West – has undergone deep and lasting changes since the 1960s. Two changes stand as paramount. First, the Catholic Church is transitioning from a majority church or a closed Catholic subculture to becoming, in many countries, a minority church, operating in a predominantly secular and competitive environment with a smaller committed following and with less institutional resources at its disposal. Second, the ways in which people relate to the Church are changing as well. Commitment is no longer self-evident or deferential. Once characterized as a flock led by their shepherds, those interested and active in the Church today exhibit a more critical and seeking attitude. These developments, as well as some other important trends regarding the role of the Catholic Church in society, will be examined in the first, empirical part of this book; in the second, philosophical and theological part, the consequences of the new situation for the Catholic Church and its theology will be studied. The present chapter, which serves as an introduction to this volume and builds on its contributions, is focused on characterizing the present-day relationship between the Church and seekers and on exploring, on a basic level, some new opportunities for a Catholic minority church to continue to appeal to larger sections of the population.

The analyses and prospects presented in this volume are, of course, heavily influenced by the situation of the Church and its societal context in the countries in which we, as contributors, are living and working, i.e. Belgium and the Netherlands, and, for one author, Germany and Austria. These European countries are regarded to be highly secularized, meaning that the main Christian churches have lost much of their former societal significance. We are aware that another territorial vantage point, e.g., Italy or the Philippines, might have given rise to different perspectives, e.g., a more self-assured view in which it is assumed that religion, in general, and the Catholic Church, in particular, will retain their central position in society. The experience of Northwestern Europe, however, is different. What is more, we are convinced that far-reaching secularization and pluralization, and the concomitant shift towards a more fragile minority position of the main churches in this part of the world will become, in due

course, the basic condition for most religions in other countries on the globe as well. Hence, we hope that the focus of this book on the highly secularized countries of Northwestern Europe will also be instructive to researchers working in other, at least for now, less secularized countries and continents.

THE 'POST-CHRISTIAN' CONDITION

From a Majority to a Minority Church

Let us first look at the new structural position of the Catholic Church in Northwestern Europe. Due to the processes of secularization and (religious) pluralization, the Church, since about 1960, is evolving towards a minority church. Three phases can be distinguished:

1. Leaving aside the debate about whether secularization started already in or even before the 19th century, one can state that until about 1960, the Catholic Church was in many countries – like in Belgium, Austria, Italy, or Spain – the majority church, sometimes even occupying a monopoly position. In the Protestant countries with sizeable Catholic minorities – like the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, or the United States – a cohesive Catholic subculture, a so-called 'fortress church' (elsewhere labeled as 'pillar', 'milieu' or 'Lager'), was built up after 1800. In both cases, the Catholic Church was leading in alliance with the elites of the country or subculture. The Church and (sub)society were regarded as more or less identical, an image cherished and idealized as 'natural' in Catholic circles.

2. After 1960, active involvement in the Catholic Church started to shrink rapidly, though most people were still influenced by Catholicism and regarded themselves, when asked in opinion polls, as Catholics. This development, resulting in a smaller core and a lot of people situating themselves between core Catholics and people without any religious affiliation, was captured by the Belgian sociologists, Jaak Billiet and Karel Dobbelaere, as a transition "from churchd Catholicism to social-cultural Christianity."¹ Grace Davie labeled this state of affairs as "vicarious religion": "religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing."² In

¹ Jaak Billiet and Karel Dobbelaere, *Godsdienst in Vlaanderen. Van kerks katholicisme naar sociaal-kulturele kristenheid?* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1976).

² Grace Davie, "Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge," *Everyday Religion. Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 22.

this situation, the Catholic Church, although no longer master of the situation, was still in the center of (sub)society.

3. In the third stage, active involvement is declining further, but now the in-between group is also shrinking. Voas shows, using the data of the European Social Survey of 2002-2003 in 22 European countries, that “fuzzy fidelity” – the in-betweens with some basic knowledge of and sympathy for Christianity – do not constitute a stable and self-sustaining category.³ The middle category begins to rise when secularization sets in; it reaches a high point when the religious and non-religious are about equal in size and declines when the non-religious overtake in quantity the religious part of the population. Thus, the final result is a small and declining inner core and a somewhat larger, but also numerically decreasing, outer shell. The main church or churches have then evolved towards the periphery of society. They have, in the words of Hervieu-Léger, become “excultured.”⁴

Taking the contribution of Loek Halman (see a.o. tables 2 and 4) as our guide in an attempt to interpret the situation of the main churches in Western countries on the basis of these three stages, we observe that the first two stages still apply to most countries. In a number of them, the main church still acts as the national church, with close links to the political, economic, and cultural elites of the country. In particular, some Orthodox countries in East and Southeast Europe (e.g., Greece, Georgia) are still in the first phase. In Malta and Poland, the Catholic Church is still occupying center stage. A large number of countries can be situated in the second stage. Secularization is visible, yet the main churches remain important. There is moderate active involvement, ties with important sections of the population, links with the political system: Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal) and Germany come to mind. A limited number of countries are in the third stage, showing far-reaching secularization and increasing marginalization of the main churches, without the rise of new churches or groups to fill up the void: e.g., the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Hungary, and the United Kingdom (without Northern Ireland). Remnants of the past are still present, e.g., church weddings and funerals of royals, or the turn to church rituals in times of national disasters. Yet, by and large, these countries are tending towards becoming ‘post-Christian’ in the near future.

Although Halman points out that Europe is far from secular – the majority of people in Europe and other Western countries say they believe

³ David Voas, “The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe,” *European Sociological Review* 25, 2 (2009), pp. 161-167.

⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

in God and adhere to a church – he also observes creeping and steady secularization in most countries. And, although it is to be expected that the religious differences between countries will persist, with main churches retaining a strong position in some countries, we nevertheless expect, as said, that the majority of countries will, sooner or later, end up in the third stage. This volume wants to reflect upon this new ‘post-Christian’ condition. What are the options for the former main churches, in particular the Catholic minority church, to gain a new attractiveness in post-Christian societies? What theology, which approach and organization, and which range of activities are appropriate to give presence to the Christian gospel in our time?

A final remark regards the title of this volume and this introduction. With the expression ‘a Catholic minority church’, as distinguished from ‘a minority Catholic Church’, we want to emphasize that, in our view, all churches will eventually become minorities in a predominantly secular society, with the result that there will no longer be majority churches at all. In contrast, in the recent past, and still in many countries today, majority churches were and still are the rule, whereas minority churches were/are in the margins of society.⁵ In England, for instance, the Church of England was, until about 1960, the majority church and the Catholic Church was, at the time, a minority, i.e., ‘a minority Catholic Church’. But in the current situation, in which *all* churches are becoming minorities, we prefer the expression ‘a Catholic minority church’ (or ‘a Protestant minority church’, etc.) to mark the difference with the non-churched majority.

The Many Stripes of Seekers and Seeking

Not only the position of the main churches has changed or is changing, but also the people who are engaging in or merely encountering church and religion. Put in the language of this volume, the erstwhile ‘sheep’ or followers have been turned into seekers. Individualization and (religious) pluralization are, as is well known, the major processes behind this turn. The label ‘seekers’ gained high currency from the 1980s onwards, especially in the United States. Research depicted people in search of spirituality, but without adhering to a church.⁶ In the United States, so-called seeker-sensitive churches were promoted in evangelical circles in order to reach the un- and non-churched.

⁵ See phase one and, to a certain extent, phase two in the above overview.

⁶ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers. The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

The contributors to this volume have taken as their point of departure one of the four disjunctions that Charles Taylor has formulated in his position paper at the start of the larger project, “Faith in a Secular Age,” of which this book project is a part. He states: “There is a mode of spiritual seeking which is very widespread in the West today, but which the official church often seems to want to rebuff. Seekers ask questions, but the official church seems largely concerned with pushing certain already worked-out answers. It seems to have little capacity to listen.”⁷

Upon closer inspection, the concepts ‘seekers’ and ‘seeking’ can be – and actually are in this volume – used in more than one meaning. First, following Wuthnow in his *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, one can distinguish seekers from dwellers in a straightforward way.⁸ Seekers are then regarded as non-church members who are exploring, from outside, organized religion and in full awareness of their autonomy, what is on offer in the religious, spiritual, or life-orientating realm. They are construing their own religious blend out of a mix of different religions and life-orientations. Dwellers, on the other hand, are seen as believing and living religion within the confines of their churches. In his contribution, Loek Halman is using the dichotomy between seekers and dwellers in this sense. He concludes that seekers, defined as being religious without belonging, constitute across Europe a very small minority, about 7%, in contrast to the 60% of the Europeans who may be considered as dwellers, i.e., those who say they are religious and belong to a church. However, using another operationalization, i.e. being religious without regular church attendance, the proportion of seekers rises to 42% (table 4). According to this last criterion, Catholics across Europe are mostly dwellers, more so than Protestants and Orthodox people (figure 22). Yet, in the Netherlands, Catholic seekers outnumber Catholic dwellers (figure 23) – a finding confirmed in the surveys used by de Hart and Dekker – probably due to the low level of confidence of the Dutch Catholics in their church (figure 24). The dichotomy between inside dwellers and outside seekers can also inform theology. In this volume, Stephan van Erp is insisting on maintaining the difference between the two in order to avoid the trap of an all-too-easy accommodation – expressed in more traditional language – of the Church to the world. In his view, theologians should not desperately try to

⁷ George F. McLean, “Introduction. Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” *Church and People. Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Christian Philosophical Studies, 1 (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 5.

⁸ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven. Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

overcome the disjunction, but rather present foundational views to enable conversation and appealing practices with the outside seekers.

As Wuthnow himself already suggested, there is no absolute separation between seekers and dwellers. Many dwellers are seeking for spiritual enrichment, both within and outside their home church, no less than the seekers without affiliation to a church. Active church members are often avid internet surfers. They consult web pages of other churches almost as often as those of their home church.⁹ Hence, Joep de Hart and Paul Dekker are distinguishing in this volume, in addition to the category of non-affiliated seekers, two kinds of church members: seeking and non-seeking ones. They observe, firstly, that a large majority of Dutch believers agree that one ought to continue seeking deeper insights (table 3), and, furthermore, that a slight majority approves of the suggestion that one ought to assemble one's religion from different traditions (table 1). In other words, seeking in this broader sense has become normative for the majority of believers. Yet, in the real world, the practice of seeking, i.e., whether one is indeed gathering wisdom from different traditions, is far less widespread (table 2). It takes time, energy, and ability to practice seeking. De Hart and Dekker also show that seeking church members believe and practice not much less than their dwelling companions, the main difference being the stress of the former on inner experience (table 8 and 9). Affiliated seeking, so they conclude, should not be interpreted as a transitional phase on the way out of the church. On the contrary, it has become, in our advanced modern age, a permanent and substantial group of people inside the main churches. The case study by Kees de Groot and Jos Pieper on Christian spiritual centers in the Netherlands offers additional information on a particular group, namely, the very active religious seekers. The visitors of these centers qualify as both highly churchd – in terms of belief, practice, and volunteering – and intensely seeking spiritual enrichment, including, and without any reservation, 'alternative' religiosity (Eastern religion, New Age and esotericism, alternative psychology). They share some specific qualities. Although highly churchd, they are, at the same time, very critical towards and disappointed in the hierarchical church organization and its doctrinal stance. Moreover, they are exceptional in terms of age (with an average of 61 years), gender (76% female), and education (75% higher professional or university education). They are exceptional, too, in comparison with society at large: this group of people represents only a small segment of the total number of seekers and religious people alike, a segment that is, moreover, stagnating.

⁹ Elena Larsen, "CyberFaith : How Americans Pursue Religion Online" (http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2001/PIP_CyberFaith_Report.pdf.pdf) (2 October 2014).

Finally, one can define ‘seeking’ in a general way as a characteristic feature of the “individualized individuals” (Luhmann) of our time. Indeed, individualization entails making choices all the time, living a life that is no longer comprehensively bound by an institution, but guided by the normative values of expressive individualism and authenticity.¹⁰ The last chapter of the first part of this volume and three chapters of the second part use the concept ‘seeking’ in this general sense: Staf Hellemans, when he writes about a new church that is willing to assist all people in their search for a fulfilling life; Peter Jonkers in his plea for a church that reevaluates its tradition of wisdom as a way to overcome the disjunction with society; Terrence Merrigan in his analysis of the inward turn as an opportunity for “the fragile recovery of transcendence in the midst of our secular age”; Rainer Bucher when he states that God is, in the end, the ultimate seeking agent, offering salvation to humans, and that the Church, in turn, can only be “a Church of seekers as People of God on a pilgrimage towards God.”

In sum, it is legitimate to use the label ‘seekers’ in diverging ways. Each rendering of the term highlights a specific aspect of seeking. Moreover, the multiple perspectives that the concepts ‘seekers’ and ‘seeking’ allow for, demonstrate how pervasive seeking has become in our time. Nevertheless, it is important not to identify the generic term ‘seekers’ with the small group of the active seekers, nor to idealize these highly active seekers as the stage setting vanguard. On the contrary, one has to keep in mind that the non-active seekers and the religious indifferent constitute, in the secularized countries, the overall majority of the population. Moreover, seeking, in most cases, does not imply deep and unsettling existential search. As Merrigan, presenting a metaphor from yet another book by Wuthnow, makes clear, seeking usually takes the form of religious tinkering – or bricolage – and of seeking practical solutions out of the different materials at hand. “Life may be a pastiche with which a person is content.”¹¹ All these different renderings of seeking, generic as well as specific, intense or apathetic, unsettling or practical, demonstrate the sea change in the way of life of those living in advanced modernity. It is a change which the Catholic Church cannot avoid addressing.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 473-504.

¹¹ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers. How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 15.

The Inevitable Disjunction Between Minority Church and Society

There is ample empirical evidence of the existence of a deep disjunction between church and society. The secularization process continues through ups and downs – the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the religious resurgence in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s are examples of desecularization – and is now, particularly in Western and parts of Central Europe, attaining high levels. According to de Hart and Dekker, in 2012 only 30% of the Dutch population considered itself a member of one of the traditional churches (compared to over 75% in 1958). Participation in Sunday services has shrunk considerably to about 10%. Moreover, more than 50% of the Dutch population says that it gathers its beliefs and ways of life from what is available on the market of traditions and ideas, Christian as well as non-Christian, religious as well as secular. A staggering 96% think that in order to be religious one doesn't need a church. The main churches are weakening, resulting in a smaller presence and a decrease of their impact on society.

In a sense, the widening of the disjunction between (main) church and society in advanced modernity is inevitable.¹² It is the corollary result of the fact that the Church has become a minority. This, in turn, is a consequence of the fact that the main churches, and in particular the Catholic Church, have lost many of the functions (social, educational, political, cultural, scientific, artistic), which they used to perform before 1960. Other factors that have aggravated this disjunction are the competition with other churches and religions, and the spread of expressive individualism to all layers of society. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Catholic Church was able to instruct and mobilize the rank and file to the highest degree ever possible. In those times, the conjunction between the Church hierarchy and its following, between the Church and (sub)society, reached a high point. Many analyses of the current position of the Catholic Church are still imbued by this past. Even today, these analyses are written in terms of loss, and the term 'resurgence' is often just another name for longing for the normative and idealized past of the 'fortress' in the first modernity. But returning to the 'great conjunctions' of the past, be it Roman, medieval, or modern, is not an option. We have to think about religion and the Catholic Church in new ways as a response to the challenges of our time, as a new stage in the Christian tradition, without mourning the past. However, there is no need to be too pessimistic in this respect. Although overall trust in the churches has been declining

¹² Staf Hellemans, "The *Magisterium*: Conjunctions and Disjunctions in Modernity. A historical-sociological analysis," *Towards Kenotic Vision of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014).

since the 1960s, and although they have lost their monopoly, when it comes to giving answers to moral and existential questions, the churches are still able to inspire large numbers of people. In comparison to other organizations such as political parties, trade unions, environmental organizations, and sports clubs, the 'market share' of the established churches in the religious field is still by far the largest. They continue to attract the lion's share of people interested in religious matters.

The Contingent Meeting of Two Sides

In view of all this, we think that it is no longer realistic to expect, as was still the case at the time of Vatican II, that the majority of the population will, almost spontaneously, return to the Catholic Church, even if it did find the right approach and carve out the right religious offer for contemporary society. For one thing, there is a great diversity of opinions regarding the concrete content of this 'right' approach and offer. Second, the idea that non-Catholics are, so to speak, Catholics-in-waiting, who are, in principle and almost instinctively, prepared to come over, has turned out to be invalid.

In fact, the question how a Catholic minority church can find a new appeal in a world of seekers involves two sides, namely, the Catholic Church and the seekers, each with their own perspectives and needs. Hence, the meeting between seekers and the Catholic Church will be the result of a two-way process. Moreover, a conjunction between these two sides is contingent and partial, and in need of constant renewal. As far as the side of the Church is concerned, the question is whether, how, and under which conditions it will be able to appeal (again) to a significant part of the population. Here, the focus is put on the options and reactions of the Catholic Church. In this volume, the Church's side of this two-way process has our primary attention. However, the question of a Catholic minority church also concerns the development of society and the addressees of the Church. Today's society consists of people whose religious attitude has, in many cases, moved even beyond Grace Davie's qualification of "believing without belonging." Whereas Davie's characterization still presupposes a certain familiarity with, or at least knowledge of, a religious tradition, contemporary people's religious attitudes often rather reflect a 'longing without belonging', which stresses the rather undefined and syncretistic character of their beliefs and (religious) practices. Because this longing is so indefinite, many people cannot help but see the objects of this longing as a social construction of reality, and as endlessly replaceable by other ones. This explains why they

sense a kind of homelessness and irony towards their own beliefs.¹³ One can argue on good philosophical and theological grounds, as Jonkers and Merrigan do, that such an attitude towards one's own life and convictions is, in the long run, not sustainable, either on an individual or on a societal level. Yet, it is an empirical fact that many people turn their back on the offer of the churches and religions. In other words, what remains to be seen is whether, how, and under which conditions active and less active seekers are construing their religion, Christian as well as non-Christian. Only then can it become apparent how (un)likely it is and will be for seekers to respond to the appeal of the Catholic Church.

CONJOINING A MINORITY CHURCH WITH SEEKERS

Given that in contemporary society the relations between the minority church and the seekers are predominantly characterized by disjunction, and that the prospects for conjoining them again are marked by a great degree of contingency, the idea of a wholesale conjunction of the two sides under firm church control has to be given up as completely unrealistic. In our times, such a scenario is only imaginable if the Church were to opt for a sectarian strategy. But even then, the Church would not have the power to stop many die-hard believers from switching churches at a later time or eventually leaving the Church altogether, nor would the Church be able to prevent the risk of schisms. However, less comprehensive efforts to forge new conjunctions obviously make sense. The last chapter of the first part of this volume and all chapters of the second part are exploring various suggestions for conjoining these two sides from the part of the Catholic Church. Most important here is that it is obvious that the 'one size fits all'-model has become obsolete, so that the Church not only has to upgrade its religious offer, but also has to include different types of people and different degrees of religious commitment.¹⁴ It also needs to reform its organizational structure and attitude in order to be able to reach out to seekers.¹⁵ Actually, the Church has always been good at adapting its institutional organization to changing contextual factors. Again, there is no reason to be overly pessimistic. Nevertheless, what the Church will have to give up is the kind of

¹³ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 73-78.

¹⁴ Peter Jonkers, "A Purifying Force For Reason. Pope Benedict on the Role of Christianity in Advanced Modernity," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity. Transformations, Visions, Tensions* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012), pp. 96-101.

¹⁵ Staf Hellemans, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, pp. 28-32.

ultramontane mass Catholicism which used to dominate in the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁶ It will have to make room for a kenotic church, for a seeker-friendly church – without guarantees.¹⁷

In the final section of this introduction we want to situate the suggestions and strategies for a conjunction of the Catholic minority church with the seekers against a broader background. Again, we want to emphasize that the success of these suggestions and strategies for conjunction is anything but guaranteed, since all of them are fundamentally marked by the contingencies that characterize the relations between church and society. The observations of the previous section confront all churches with a fundamental dilemma: should they confine their pastoral care to the existing in-crowd, in other words, the dwellers inside these churches, thereby putting up with the fact that this group is dwindling and aging, or should they reach out to the seekers (inside and outside the churches), thereby taking the risk that the latter will only take scattered pieces of their narratives, teachings, and practices to heart. As the title of this book already suggests, we are convinced that the churches should take the latter option.

Theoretical Considerations Regarding the Conjunction Strategy

What are the sociological, philosophical, and theological considerations supporting the main thesis of all contributors to this volume, namely, that the Catholic Church should opt for a conjunction with seekers? When the question of how to conjoin church and society is raised, two contrasting strategies are often put forward: a conservative, sectarian one, and a liberal, merging one. From a sociological perspective, both strategies fall short of expectations. The conservative strategy puts its odds on a highly demanding religion and tight community building. However, this strategy to confine the conjunction of the Church with society to the in-crowd of strongly believing church members risks the Church ending up only with ‘the happy few’. The liberal strategy wants to renew, along the lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, the alliance between the Church and the modern world. But this strategy fails to see the abstractness and lack of relevance of its proposals in the current societal setting, which predominantly consists of people who are quite indifferent to religious issues, and who regard any ecclesiastical strategy to conjoin with the world very suspiciously. Moreover, if this strategy boiled down to an affirmation without reservations of the actual world, it will not convince people to reconnect to the Church, since it offers no answer to the pressing

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-23.

¹⁷ Wacław Hryniewicz, *The Spirit: The Cry of the World* (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014), p. ix.

existential and moral questions that living in today's world precisely generates, just as it does not present a plausible, spiritual alternative to the actual world. In sum, the outlook for the Catholic Church for conjoining itself to the world in a successful way seems bleak: the conservatives have a workable strategy but only for a small number of highly committed people. The liberals have lofty ideas, but without being able to translate them into an effective church strategy. The work of elaborating a fitting offer for people to lead a fulfilled life in advanced modernity is huge. And there are lots of competitors.

Apart from the sociological arguments that prevent the question of how to conjoin the Church and the seekers to be answered unambiguously, there are also fundamental theological reasons for the thesis that faith and world always have been and always will be strange bedfellows. These reasons can be summarized by the word of the Gospel that Christians are indeed *in*, but not *of* the world.¹⁸ Against this background, the question of the conjunction of the Church and seekers turns into a paradox: how can the Church remain faithful to its true mission, which is fundamentally an unworldly, godly one, while it has, at the same time, the missionary vocation to open itself up to the world and to keep in touch with all people, especially with those who are seeking meaning and orientation in their lives? It is obvious that this paradox cannot be avoided, and can even less be solved, because it belongs to the essence of Christian faith.¹⁹

Against this complex background of the paradoxical relation between faith and the world, this volume discusses fundamental ideas as well as concrete strategies on how church and society can be conjoined in our time, and what these mean for the Church and for theology. An important common observation that is made by all contributors is that, at least in Western Europe and the United States, a new type of Catholicism is emerging, which can be defined as 'choice Catholicism'. Put more concretely, the Catholic minority church has only religious means to attract believers, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy can no longer promote its message as the leader of an encompassing Catholic world, consisting of an extended network of societal institutions, such as schools and universities, welfare work, cultural organizations, trade unions, etc. Furthermore, the large numbers of priests who belonged to the intellectual and social elite have been only partly replaced by lay movements of Catholics and 'new ecclesial movements'. This is leading to a dramatic change in the institutional set-up of the Church: in many Western

¹⁸ Peter Jonkers, "In the World, but not of the World. The Prospects of Christianity in the Modern World," *Bijdragen* 61 2000, pp. 370-389.

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Freiburg im Breisgau, Sunday, September 25, 2011* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011).

European countries, parishes are in disarray due to the lack of priests, lay pastoral workers, and the aging of voluntary workers; but the new structures of the Church on a local level are still wrapped in mystery. It goes without saying that new local structures are imperative if the Church is to reach out to the seekers, inside as well as outside the Church.²⁰

As to the content of Catholic faith, it will only have something to say to seekers if it succeeds in presenting itself as a way of inward, spiritual life, which dwells from a divine source, an expression of traditional wisdom, capable of truthfully orientating the lives of humans, a community of people who stimulate each other to follow Christ's living example, and, of course, a message of hope for the many seekers of our times, especially outside the Church, encouraging them to put their lives in the sign of the risen Lord and to join the community of believers.²¹

Roads to a Theology of Conjunction

The option to reach out to the world of the seekers raises the question of what theological ideas could offer a theoretical underpinning of this approach. The contributors to the last part of this volume explore various roads leading to a 'theology of conjunction'. Jonkers starts with a philosophical analysis of the world of the seekers. Confronted with a plurality of lifestyles and their underpinning narratives, many people are persuaded that all of them are equally contingent so that their only option is to stick to the one they feel most familiar with. However, this attitude falls short of expectations because, just like any other human being, the seekers strive for a public recognition of their ways of life as authentic expressions of what it means to be human and, hence, as not completely contingent.²² He argues that Christian faith can offer a way out of this paradox by presenting itself as an expression of wisdom, thus offering seekers concrete examples of truthful life-orientations, but without overwhelming them with massive, fixed, and pre-given dogmatic answers.

Merrigan's contribution proposes to conjoin Christian faith with the world of seekers by developing, in dialogue with Taylor and Wuthnow, a Newmanian perspective on the religious subject. Newman focuses on the

²⁰ Staf Hellemans, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," pp. 24-28.

²¹ Peter Jonkers, "Religious Truth in a Globalising World," *Religion and Politics in the New Century: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives* (Sydney University Press, 2009), pp. 197-203.

²² Peter Jonkers, "Contingent Religions, Contingent Truths?" *Religions Challenged by Contingency. Theological and Philosophical Perspectives to the Problem of Contingency* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 176.

subject's inward turn and highlights, in particular, the crucial role of conscience. This approach resonates, according to Merrigan, remarkably well with the moral ideal of today's people, namely, to be true to oneself or to be authentic. For Merrigan, this inward turn in religion must be conceived of in terms of a spectrum between two poles, namely, individuated subjectivism, which emphasizes self-reliance, and relational subjectivism, in which encounters with others are regarded as crucial for the development of one's own subjective life. Following Newman and Taylor, Merrigan thinks it essential that relational subjectivism will prevail, but, at the same time, this is anything but certain because of the decline of communal religious life in a world that is dominated by individualized seekers. Against this background, he points to the topical relevance of Newman's turn to conscience as a way to rupture from within the self-enclosed space of contemporary culture, which is the pitfall in which today's seekers risk ending up. Merrigan suggests that through the experience of conscience, Christian faith is able to conjoin with the subjective turn of religion in our times, and, more specifically, to reach out to the seekers while, at the same time, offering them a viable alternative to the risk of being caught in the superficiality of an immanent frame.

Van Erp starts, as stated earlier, from the difference between inside dwellers and outside seekers and cautions against blurring the difference too quickly. However, a theological framework of God's divine promise for and presence in the world, for dwellers *and* for seekers, should be elaborated. In particular, Van Erp explores whether and how public life can be seen as a sacrament, in other words, as a 'locus theologicus'. Its ultimate goal is to show how this world itself is the space for the nearness of God's reign, i.e., emerging from God's sacramental presence. This approach is based on the fact that seekers and dwellers, people outside and inside the churches, have something in common insofar as they both participate in public life and share a common practice. This common ground deserves to be explored further within the framework of sacramental theology. It could offer secular culture a view of God's coming presence in public life: an ongoing relationship confirmed and maintained by a politics of trust, a sacramental performance that will not suggest it could make God's presence itself visible.

Finally, Bucher focuses on the need of the Catholic Church to embark on a new path and to take a new social shape. In our time, the old form – clerical, exclusivist, and excessively institutionalized – is in the process of deconstruction. Happily, 'a viable program' for a new Church has already been laid down in the Second Vatican Council. The central characteristic of this approach is kenosis, which means that the Catholic Church has to define itself as a church of the people. Such a kenotic church has to express its solidarity with humankind without reservation because

God offers his grace to all people. This principled stance to exclude nobody, to become, paradoxically, a minority church for all, is not only really new for the Church, but it is also risky because it is realized not in the institution nor in ‘the end of history’, but only in the singular event of the graceful encounter with God. This means that pastoral care and flexible arrangements get the pivotal role in the Church, to the detriment of maintaining the Church as an established organization.

Strategies for a Conjunction between the Church and the Seekers

On a more concrete level, the question arises as to what strategies the Catholic Church can devise in order to reach out to the world of seekers. First of all, it has to realize, as de Hart and Dekker point out, that reaching seekers outside the churches will be difficult because their basic attitude is that one doesn’t need a church in the first place in order to be religious. Furthermore, they are – just as the most active affiliated seekers (see the contribution of de Groot and Pieper in this respect) – loath to the idea of faith as an all-in package, and prefer a personal approach with a lot of attention to the experiential dimension of faith and respect for their own interpretations of religious truths, which are tailored to their stage of life and lifestyle. At any rate, the Church needs to respond to the dominant societal trends of individualization and pluralization if it wants its offer to be accepted by the seekers inside and outside the Church. But, at the same time, the Church has to reach out to its core members and respond to their needs as well. Last but not least, it has to safeguard its identity, since recognizability is a crucial asset in our current multiple-choice society. These basic insights pose a huge challenge for the organizational structure of the Church: as a universal church it needs, at the same time, to think and to act locally, that is, to reach out to small communities and informal networks (including the exploding number of virtual ones). To use another paradox: in times of deinstitutionalization, the Church has to show its institutional relevance. It can only realize this if it is able to reinvent itself as an institution in a time of profound institutional instability.

On a theoretical level, Hellemans and Bucher discuss diverse strategies for growth in the mainline churches. What is most striking in this respect is that the Catholic Church does not seem to have any strategy at all, perhaps because it erroneously thinks that it still has a monopoly in the religious field, and that it can stick to its fixed structures. The first part of this volume makes abundantly clear that this is no longer the case: the Church has become willy-nilly one player among others in the competitive market of church growth and decline. Moreover, a power reversal is happening between the clergy to the lay seekers, which forces the Church into the position of suppliant: it can no longer enforce its doctrines and moral norms, but, instead, has to convince, to attract, to

appeal. Furthermore, by accommodating the rules of the market, the Church runs the risk of taking for granted the problematic character of these rules, and thus of losing its identity. Addressing the public in an appropriate way has become paramount, and an appealing leader is an enormous asset in this respect. What is even more important in these times of expressive individualism is that this leader shows authenticity, that he, as a person, is the incarnation of the message he stands for, as the example of Pope Francis has made abundantly clear. Although challenging, devising an effective growth strategy is not a mission impossible for the Church, especially because it can learn from other (secular and religious) large organizations and institutions, which are going through a similar process. All of them are experiencing the fundamental impact of individualization and pluralization on their internal structures. However, humans are fundamentally social beings, so there is no reason to believe that they will suddenly cease to be so. What has changed, and is still changing, are the ways in which people organize themselves, as well as the things they expect from the organizations they choose to belong to.

As regards its concrete response to individualization, the first thing that has to be noted is that the Church, because of the importance it has always attached to a communal religious life, strives to be an effective countermovement against the distress that is caused by an individualism that has gotten out of proportion. In principle, the Catholic Church welcomes everyone without reservation, and many people find this a blessing in times of social isolation. Furthermore, religious life, in spite of all the doom and gloom about the decreasing numbers of faithful, can still rely on a finely-woven network with a varied offer for individuals looking for spiritual enrichment and healing, local groups of church members who want to celebrate and deepen their faith, and outsiders who are interested in all kinds of religious matters. Even in these times of individualism, people are keen to share experiences of spiritual life with likeminded others, to gather food for thought on all kinds of moral and existential issues, to assemble around ideals and concrete initiatives regarding the good life, etc. As already noted above, the Church is still quite successful in this respect: it has proven itself capable of staging large national and even worldwide events, such as the mass audiences with the pope and his visits to foreign countries, mass pilgrimages to various sanctuaries, World Youth Days, etc. With respect to the Church's response to pluralization, it has to be noted that its offer has always been quite diverse and certainly not masterminded from one place (Rome) and by one person (the pope). It covers a wide range of activities, such as spiritual healing, reaching out to the poor and the needy, intellectual enrichment, political commitment, from low church to high church, from a local to a global level, etc.

Nevertheless, what the Church will have to give up is the kind of ultramontane mass Catholicism, which used to dominate religious life in the West. Similarly, the triumphalism, which characterized this period, will have to make room for a kenotic humility, which is critical of ecclesial egoisms, self-centeredness, and self-satisfaction. Phrased positively, a kenotic church is, first of all, friendly to people, that is, close to the poor, not only those who are in physical or material need, but also those who have lost hope in the meaningfulness of their lives. Furthermore, it is a church that is also open to dialogue with those who do not believe. In sum, it is a seeker-friendly church.

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PART I

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS

CHAPTER I

PATTERNS OF EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

LOEK HALMAN

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the pattern of religious life in Europe, focusing in particular on the similarities and diversities that may exist. It has been argued and empirically observed elsewhere that religious traditions persist and appear to have enduring impact on people and societies.¹ Religious life is therefore unlikely to be the same across the continent. European societies not only vary in religious traditions, they are also not equally modernized or individualized, and hence not equally (post)modern. Moreover, Europeans are not equally autonomous. Differences in their degrees of believing and belonging, or in Wuthnow's terminology,² of seeking or dwelling, are to be expected.

This chapter is mainly descriptive and not explanatory or hypothesis testing. Thus, we do not address the more intriguing question of why Europe might be different from other modern societies, such as the United States, Canada and Australia. We merely examine Europe's religious life and compare it with the religious patterns in these other highly advanced modern societies. We do not elaborate theories and hypotheses about why European societies may be so diverse in their religious life. Of course, manifold suggestions are available to explain the differences between Europe and other, apparently more religious parts of the world, but these will not be examined or tested in this chapter. Possible explanations can be found, for example, in the works of Steve Bruce,³ who is one of the most prominent defenders of secularization in Europe, or in the contributions of Grace Davie,⁴ Berger, Davie and Fokas,⁵ and Norris

¹ E.g., Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); see also Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Idem, *Secularization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007).

⁵ Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008).

and Inglehart,⁶ to mention a few. Furthermore, Miklós Tomka⁷ has written much about religion and religious trends in Central and Eastern Europe.

This chapter does investigate trends in the pattern of religious life in Europe. As such, it addresses issues raised by where changes are large and where modest. Again, we do not ask explanatory questions, but are mainly concerned with religious developments over time. Because this volume is on a Catholic minority church in a world of seekers, we focus on Catholics. The word ‘seekers’ assumes that people are looking for spirituality or are interested in religious worldviews. We investigate the extent to which the Catholic Church appears to appeal to people living in contemporary modern, individualized and above all secular Europe. What do modern Europeans believe in? Are Catholics special in Europe? Finally, we explore the seekers. Seekers are defined as believers who do not actively practice their religion in the conventional sense. Such believers are not adherents of a church, and they do not regularly attend religious services. We investigate what European seekers believe in and how those beliefs may have changed. We further elaborate on Catholic seekers’ beliefs.

The data analyzed in this chapter are from the European Values Study (EVS) surveys conducted in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008 in an increasing number of countries.⁸ The 1981 and 1990 surveys were conducted in numerous countries outside of Europe as well, in particular, the United States, Canada and Australia. The data can be obtained free of charge from the Gesis Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences.⁹ In 1999 and 2008, the surveys in these countries were conducted by the World Values Survey (WVS).¹⁰ The dataset analyzed in this chapter excludes Azerbaijan, because of doubts regarding the quality of its data. Further, the data were weighted to correct for age and gender distributions.¹¹

The number of countries included in the surveys has expanded since the first data collection in 1981. That first wave covered the European Community member states, plus Spain but minus Greece. The 1990 survey was fielded throughout Western Europe and also in several

⁶ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

⁷ E.g., Miklós Tomka, *Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005); Idem, *Expanding Religion. Religious Revival in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

⁸ See: www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu; see also Loek Halman, Inge Sieben, and Marga van Zundert, *The Atlas of European Values. Trends and Traditions at the turn of the Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁹ zacat.gesis.org

¹⁰ www.worldvaluessurvey.org

¹¹ The EVS data file is ZA4804_v2-0-0.sav; the WVS data file is WVS_Longitudinal_1981-2014_spss_v_2014_06_17_Beta.sav

Central Eastern European countries. For that wave, the EVS benefited from the support of the Institute of Allensbach in coordinating the surveys in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.¹² In 1999, the fieldwork was carried out in 33 countries, including Turkey, which then became part of the EVS project.¹³ In 2008, 47 countries were included in the fourth EVS wave.

The EVS questionnaire contains numerous questions and items exploring the religious lives of Europeans. It goes without saying that it is impossible to use them all here. Nonetheless, the need to distinguish specific dimensions of religiosity is demonstrated by seminal works of Stark and Glock; Lenski; Fichter; De Jong, Faulkner and Warland; Thung et al. and, more recently, Laermans.¹⁴ The results of their analyses are ambiguous, however, on whether religious dimensions should be considered sub-dimensions of a more general or generic concept¹⁵ or whether distinctive dimensions exist that cannot be constituted into such a more general, overarching notion.¹⁶ In our current analysis, we distinguish between religious beliefs and religious practices, and within religious beliefs, we differentiate a more general religious orientation from adherence to a traditional belief.¹⁷ These distinctions enable us, for

¹² See also Peter Ester, Loek Halman, and Ruud de Moor (eds.), *The Individualizing Society* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1994).

¹³ For an overview of all these countries see Loek Halman, *The European Values Study: A Third Wave* (Tilburg: EVS, WORC, Tilburg University, 2001); Loek Halman, Ronald Inglehart, Jaime Díez-Medrano, Ruud Luijkx, Alejandro Moreno, and Miguel Basáñez, *Changing Values and Beliefs in 85 Countries. Trends from the Values Surveys from 1981 to 2004* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008); Loek Halman, Ruud Luijkx, and Marga van Zundert, *The Atlas of European Values* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹⁴ Rodney Stark, and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (New York: Double Day & Company, 1961); Joseph Henry Fichter, "Sociological Measurement of Religiosity," *Review of Religious Research* 10 (1969), pp. 169-177; Gordon F. de Jong, Joseph E. Faulkner, and Rex H. Warland, "Dimensions of Religiosity Reconsidered; Evidence from a Cross-Cultural Study," *Social Forces* 54, 4 (1976), pp. 866-889; Mady A. Thung, *Exploring the New Religious Consciousness* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1985); Rudi Laermans, "The Ambivalence of Religiosity and Religion: A Reading of Georg Simmel," *Social Compass* 53, 4 (2006), pp. 479-489.

¹⁵ E.g., Thung et al., *Exploring the New Religious Consciousness*.

¹⁶ De Jong, Faulkner, and Warland, "Dimensions of Religiosity Reconsidered; Evidence from a Cross-Cultural Study," pp. 866-889.

¹⁷ For a more extensive discussion of the dimensions of religiosity refer to Stark and Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment*; Thung

instance, to address Davie's characterization of European religious life in terms of believing and belonging. As most of us will know, she¹⁸ once characterized European religiosity as believing without belonging, reflecting the finding that most Europeans are still believers, but no longer belong to a particular denomination. Indeed secularization, defined as the declining significance of institutionalized religion in society, fits Davie's expression very well. Though Europeans are apparently less and less likely to adhere to a particular religious denomination, this does not imply that most Europeans have become non-believers. Hence the European religious pattern might best be described as believing without belonging. We will explore if and to what extent this is the case.

CONTEMPORARY PATTERNS OF EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Europe: A Continent of Seekers or Dwellers?

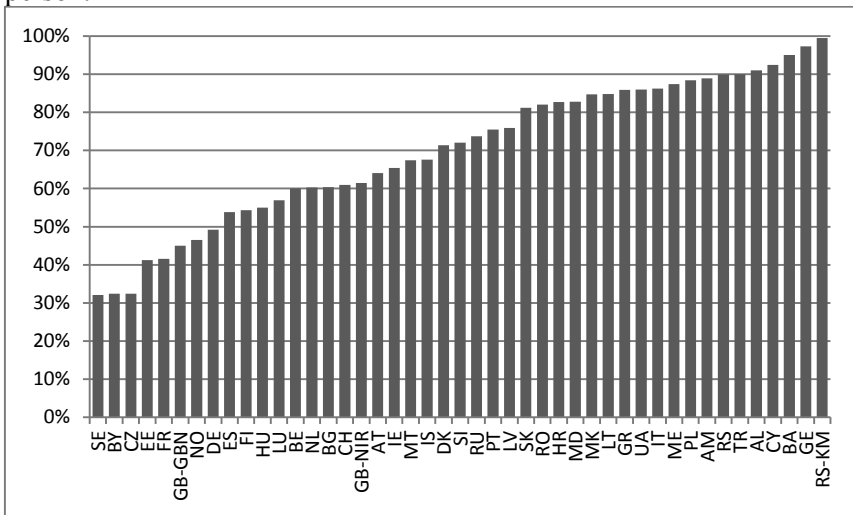
To what extent can Europe be considered a continent of seekers or dwellers? Where in Europe are the dwellers, and where are the seekers? What are the seekers seeking? Following the suggestions of Wuthnow¹⁹ and the editors of this volume (see also the introduction), we define seekers as believers who do not adhere to a traditional denomination or church religiosity, but nevertheless consider themselves to be religious. Belief is a first issue to be addressed here. The EVS asked respondents whether they considered themselves 'a religious person', 'not a religious person' or 'a convinced atheist'. Figure 1 tells us how many Europeans considered themselves a religious person without further clarification what religiosity implied to them.

et al., *Exploring the New Religious Consciousness*; Jaak Billiet, "Proposal for questions on religious identity." *European Social Survey Core Questionnaire Development*, 2002.

¹⁸ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*.

Figure 1. Percentages of respondents who consider themselves a religious person.²⁰



Most people in the Czech Republic, Belarus and Sweden did not consider themselves religious, but in other European countries majorities, large majorities in many cases, did consider themselves religious. This was particularly the case in Turkey, Albania, Cyprus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia and Kosovo, where 90% or more regarded themselves as religious. The number of convinced atheists is rather small throughout Europe, including even in the least religious countries, such as Sweden, Belarus and the Czech Republic. Across Europe, the number of convinced atheists has increased slightly since 1981. The largest groups of convinced atheists live in France (18%), the Czech Republic (16%) and Sweden (15%), but in the vast majority of European countries atheism is confined to a maximum of 5% of the population.

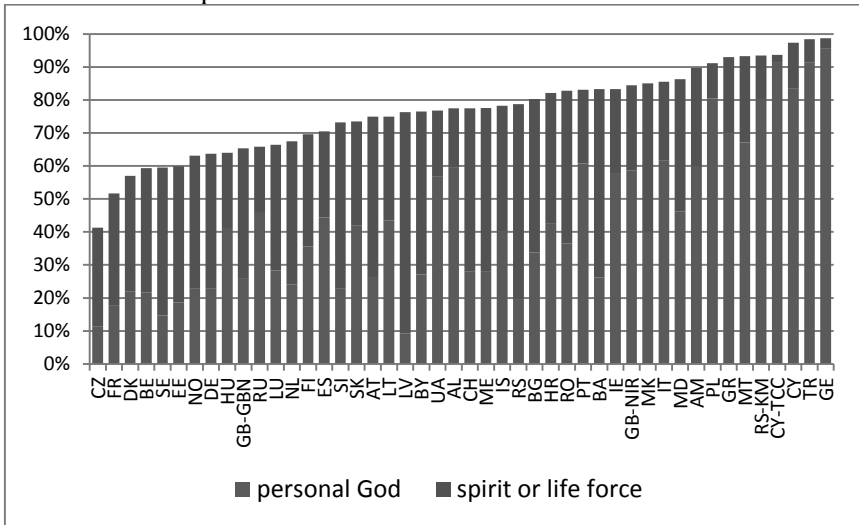
Such figures do not reveal what people do believe in. This is made apparent from a question asking people what comes closest to their beliefs. Respondents could select from ‘there is a personal god’, ‘there is some sort of spirit or life force’, ‘I don’t really know what to think’ and ‘I don’t really think there is any sort of spirit, god or life force’. These response items, respectively, tap a Christian-theistic, transcendental-deistic, agnostic and nihilistic worldview. As argued by Felling, Peters and Schreuder, “One of the essential characteristics of the Christian tradition is that it purports to be a view of the world and of human life which explains the origin of and the meaning behind the cosmos and human existence within the context of a transcendent and supernatural

²⁰ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

order.”²¹ Further, they argue that due to secularization people are less and less willing or able “to explain the origin and the meaning of the cosmos and of human life in the context of a transcendent and supernatural order.”²² If this is true, it is to be expected that the Christian-theistic worldview is on the decline and the transcendental, agnostic and nihilistic worldviews are on the increase. Hence, we expect large segments of populations to lean towards belief in a spirit or life force and low percentages to favor the idea of a personal god.

The data from the latest EVS reveal that, with the only exception being the Czech Republic, majorities, and in most cases large majorities, are still convinced that there is a personal god or some sort of spirit or life force (figure 2). Even in societies where people do not consider religion important and where the majorities do not consider themselves religious (e.g., Sweden, Estonia and Belarus), majorities – albeit small ones – appear nonetheless to believe in a personal god or some sort of spirit or life force. In Georgia, Turkey and Northern Cyprus more than nine out of every ten persons indicated belief in a personal god! As expected, in most countries, belief in a personal god has declined since 1981, while belief in a spirit or life force increased slightly.

Figure 2. Percentages of people in Europe who believe in a personal god or some sort of spirit or life force.²³



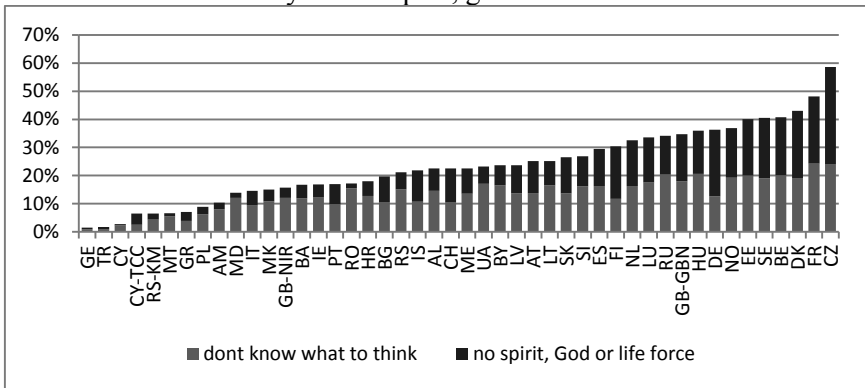
²¹ Albert Felling, Jan Peters, and Osmund Schreuder, *Dutch Religion* (Nijmegen: ITS, 1991), p. 14.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

Overall in Europe, a small minority (13%) holds an agnostic worldview, and an even smaller minority (10%) denies the existence of a spirit, god or life force. Yet only in the Czech Republic, France and Denmark can substantial segments of the populations be qualified as such. One in every three Czechs denied the existence of any sort of spirit, god or life force; in France this was one in every four. In both countries, about 25% indicated not knowing what to think of these religious matters, which is by far the highest percentage in Europe. Such categories of people hardly exist in Turkey, Georgia and Cyprus, as revealed in figure 3, which plots the percentages of Europeans who do not know what to think and do not believe in any sort of spirit, god or life force.

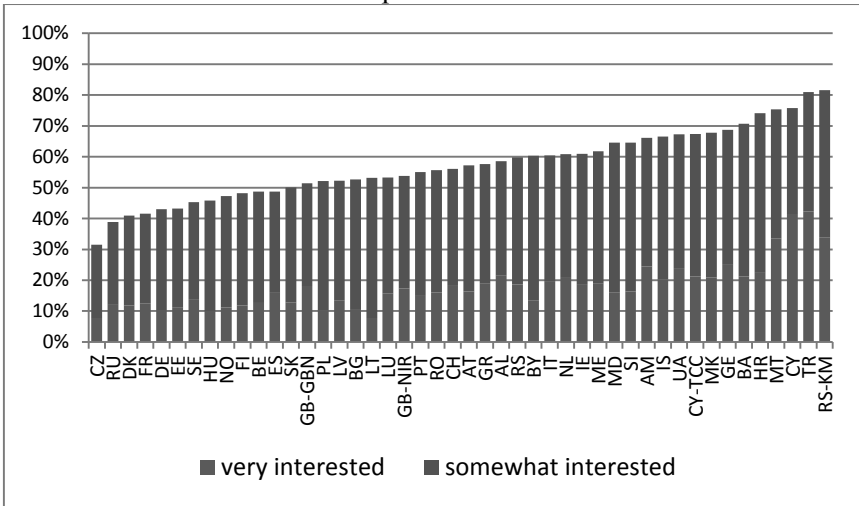
Figure 3. Percentages of people in Europe who do not know what to think and do not believe in any sort of spirit, god or life force.²⁴



To tap the idea of nontraditional or new religiosity in Europe, the latest EVS surveys included the following question: ‘whether or not you think of yourself as a religious person, how spiritual would you say you are, that is, how strongly are you interested in the sacred or the supernatural?’ Answer categories were ‘very interested’, ‘somewhat interested’, ‘not very interested’ and ‘not at all interested’. In most European countries, majorities, albeit often small ones, claimed to be somewhat or very interested in the sacred or the supernatural (figure 4). Again, the clearest exception was the Czech Republic, where only about 30% claimed to be somewhat or very interested in the sacred or the supernatural. Interest in these matters was similarly rather limited in Russia, Denmark, France, Germany and Estonia. At the other extreme were Kosovo and Turkey. In these two Muslim countries, 80% of respondents considered themselves spiritual. Also in Malta, Croatia and Cyprus large majorities shared this opinion. Thus, spirituality does appear to be widespread in Europe.

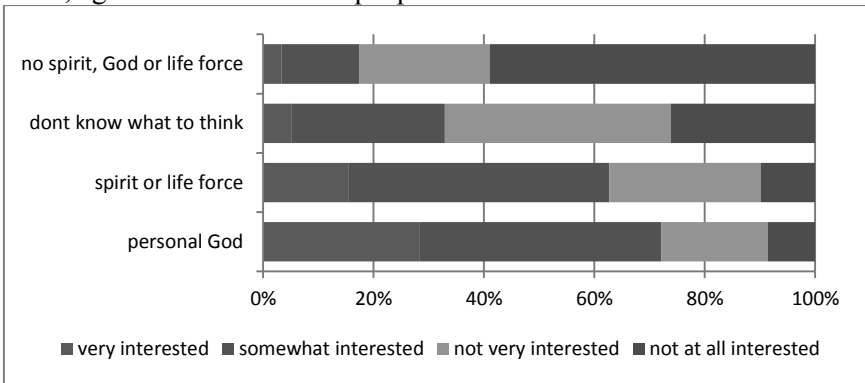
²⁴ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

Figure 4. Percentages of people in Europe who are very or somewhat interested in the sacred or the supernatural.²⁵



As can be seen in figure 5, most of those who indicated belief in a personal god also considered themselves spiritual, while those who denied the existence of a god, spirit or life force were also not (very) spiritual. So it appears rather difficult to distinguish spirituality from traditional religious worldviews.

Figure 5. Spirituality among theistic people, believers in a spirit or life force, agnostics and nihilistic people.²⁶



What spirituality really means to our respondents and how they understood the statement about spirituality are of course unknown.

²⁵ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

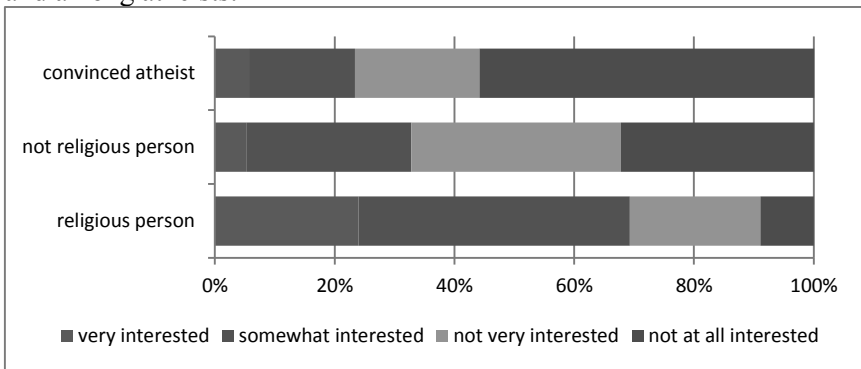
²⁶ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Indeed, the meaning of spirituality is far from clear or fixed, according to Berger, Davie and Fokas:²⁷

Quite often it means some sort of New Age faith or practice – believing in a continuity of personal and cosmic reality, reaching that reality by means of meditational exercises, finding one’s true self by discovering the ‘child within oneself.’ But quite often the meaning is also simpler: ‘I am religious, but I cannot identify with any existing church or religious tradition.’

Nonetheless, figure 6 seems to reveal that spirituality and being religious were for most people more or less the same. Religious people considered themselves spiritual, and not religious people did not feel spiritual.

Figure 6. Interest in spirituality among religious and non-religious people and among atheists.²⁸



Among Europeans, spirituality and traditional religious beliefs appear to greatly resemble each other. Does this also mean that most people in Europe still believe in traditional religious creeds such as god, life after death, hell, heaven and sin? Table 1 gives an idea.

Belief in god received the highest percentage of assent in Europe (80%), followed by belief in sin (64%). Belief in god appeared least widespread in the Czech Republic, Sweden and Estonia. Among the Czech people, just one in every three respondents subscribed to this belief. Belief in sin was least prevalent in the Scandinavian countries, but Turkish people believed in it almost unanimously. The latter also applied to Romanian, Georgian and Maltese people and Cypriots.

²⁷ Berger, Davie, Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, pp. 14-15.

²⁸ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Belief in life after death and belief in heaven were mentioned by about half of the Europeans, with those in Turkey and Malta being most likely to assent. In Northern Ireland, too, a very large majority (87%) indicated believing in heaven, though slightly less of the Northern Irish (77%) believed in life after death. Belief in life after death was least prevalent in Albania, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Estonia, while belief in heaven was least frequent among the Danes, Czechs, Estonians, Swedes, Luxembourgers, Slovenians and French. Hence, there is no uniform pattern of traditional beliefs in Europe. Countries' rank orders vary according to the particular belief statement.

Table 1. Belief in god, life after death, hell, heaven and sin in European countries (%)²⁹

	God	Life after death	Hell	Heaven	Sin
AL	94	26	26	38	38
AM	97	47	50	53	78
AT	80	61	27	41	57
BA	96	65	67	70	74
BE	61	43	18	35	44
BG	76	32	29	33	63
BY	86	44	43	46	67
CH	75	53	20	43	50
CY	98	70	58	66	92
CY-TCC	98	77	80	80	90
CZ	36	30	18	23	45
DE	63	40	18	35	47
DK	63	37	9	20	21
EE	48	33	17	24	45
ES	76	49	30	46	47
FI	69	48	23	44	54
FR	53	42	17	33	40
GB-GBN	65	53	32	52	63
GB-NIR	92	77	78	87	92
GE	99	61	80	85	94
GR	94	59	53	57	79
HR	90	58	45	59	68

²⁹ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

HU	71	36	26	35	53
IE	90	72	50	77	75
IS	72	70	17	47	61
IT	91	72	53	63	59
LT	87	68	55	59	84
LU	70	48	20	29	41
LV	77	49	33	40	67
MD	98	64	71	74	89
ME	88	29	31	38	67
MK	96	47	45	50	62
MT	99	87	85	90	93
NL	58	51	16	40	38
NO	56	47	15	40	32
PL	96	73	69	79	86
PT	86	48	35	46	62
RO	98	74	81	84	94
RS	92	35	30	38	62
RS-KM	100	76	76	79	81
RU	77	45	42	44	72
SE	46	46	10	25	18
SI	66	36	19	32	44
SK	81	64	47	54	68
TR	99	94	98	98	99
UA	90	51	53	58	87
EUR	80	53	41	51	64

The traditional beliefs do not seem to have disappeared in Europe, though in most places they have diminished slightly in prominence. Belief in god remains widespread. Turkey appears to be the society with the most traditional beliefs, followed by Malta and Northern Cyprus. At the opposite extreme, the Swedes, Czechs, Danes and Estonians can be characterized as the least devout in Europe.

Durkheim,³⁰ among others, stresses the importance of religious institutions. Indeed without churches and religious communities there

³⁰ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912 [2001]).

might be no religion. The more integrated people are in their religion, the more likely they are to follow the rules and regulations of a religious institute. But in the secular world of today, individuals are autonomous, free to believe what they want to believe and to decide for themselves whether they will attend religious services and join church activities. It is therefore likely that those people who are still involved in religious life and do participate in church services and activities have freely chosen to do so.

Religious involvement can be measured first of all by belonging to a church, religious organization or denomination. Before 1990, the EVS simply asked to which religious denomination one belonged.³¹ However, many people born and baptized into a certain religious group, say, Catholic or Protestant, might have reported religious belonging to that group even if they were not really involved in religious life and did not consider themselves as belonging to a church. The 1990 EVS survey introduced a two-step procedure to determine religious affiliation. It added the filter question, ‘do you belong to a religious organization’. If the answer was ‘yes’, it then asked ‘which one’. This two-step version is thought to eliminate ‘fringe’ church members, that is, “people who are formally still members of the church but who are on the periphery in terms of mentality”.³²

Three out of every four respondents in the EVS reported belonging to a church. It is thus difficult to assert that Europe is unchurched and that secularization has driven people away from the traditional religious institutions. Of course, there are differences in Europe. Church adherence was extremely low in the Czech Republic and Estonia, where 30% or less appear to belong to a religious denomination, but these two countries are exceptional cases. In the other two countries where relatively large numbers of people indicated not considering themselves as belonging to a religious denomination, the Netherlands and France, almost half of the populations still indicated such belonging. In the other countries, majorities, and even large majorities in many cases, claimed to belong to a religious denomination.

Yet, church belonging does not necessarily reveal the degree to which people are religiously integrated. As Bruce argues, it requires “far less effort to have one’s name on a church role than to attend its

³¹ See, e.g., Stephen Harding, David Phillips, Michael Fogarty, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe: Unity, Diversity and Change* (London: MacMillan, 1986) for the 1981 EVS survey questionnaire.

³² Jos Becker, “Church membership investigated (1950-2002).” *The Dutch and their Gods* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), pp. 62-64; see also Billiet, “Proposal for questions on religious identity.”

services.”³³ We therefore focus on church attendance as a measure of religious integration, although it should be noted that attendance at church worship services may not always be an outward manifestation of devoutness. For some, church attendance may merely be “a social ritual that does not necessarily reflect one’s inward state.”³⁴ People may “attend church in order to meet their friends and neighbors, to hear the music, or to observe social traditions that have become largely secular.”³⁵

The question in the 2008 EVS about the frequency of church attendance provided seven answer possibilities: ‘more than once a week’, ‘once a week’, ‘monthly’, ‘only on specific holy days’, ‘once a year’, ‘less often’ and ‘never’. Church attendance was lowest in France, the Czech Republic, Great Britain and Sweden, where slightly more than half of the people reported never attending a religious service. At the other extreme were Malta, Poland, Ireland, Italy, Northern Ireland and Cyprus, where large majorities (more than 80%) said they went to church at least once a month. Weekly church attendance was highest in Malta, where 77% claimed to attend a religious service at least once a week; 25% of Maltese indicated that they went to church more than once a week! In Poland, some 53% said they attended church on a weekly basis (table 2).

Table 2. Church belonging and frequencies of church attendance in European countries (%).³⁶

			Church attendance						
	Belongin g		> than once a wee k	once a wee k	once a mont h	special holy days	onc e a year	less ofte n	neve r
AL	71		3	6	5	30	5	8	43
AM	95		3	13	25	30	8	12	9
AT	83		2	14	12	23	5	11	32
BA	78		11	21	14	23	5	15	12
BE	58		1	9	8	15	8	7	51
BG	74		1	5	10	46	6	8	25
BY	72		1	6	13	36	11	10	24

³³ Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: from Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 29.

³⁴ Ronald Inglehart, Neil Nevite, and Miguel Basañez, *The North American Trajectory* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996), p. 78.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

CH	72		2	8	9	15	9	19	38
CY	100		5	22	25	37	4	3	6
CY-TCC	96		6	11	5	26	7	4	43
CZ	29		3	6	4	9	7	13	59
DE	73		1	8	13	23	6	15	35
DK	88		1	2	7	31	15	11	33
EE	31		1	3	6	19	13	12	46
ES	75		3	14	7	14	3	9	50
FI	76		1	3	6	16	15	24	35
FR	49		1	5	6	14	8	5	61
GB-GBN	55		4	8	7	7	8	9	57
GB-NIR	78		10	30	9	5	7	12	26
GE	98		6	15	17	35	3	12	12
GR	96		3	16	21	45	5	3	8
HR	83		4	20	16	22	5	15	16
HU	55		1	8	6	22	4	15	43
IE	87		8	32	14	11	9	12	15
IS	92		1	3	8	25	15	9	39
IT	82		9	25	16	27	5	3	16
LT	86		2	10	14	43	6	12	14
LU	74		3	10	10	24	7	7	39
LV	65		1	5	11	25	14	14	30
MD	94		3	10	16	49	10	5	7
ME	59		2	4	8	29	7	27	22
MK	93		5	8	12	48	6	13	9
MT	98		26	51	5	4	2	4	9
NL	49		6	10	9	14	10	6	47
NO	80		3	3	7	24	11	12	40
PL	96		8	45	19	17	2	3	6
PT	81		4	20	13	16	5	18	25
RO	98		6	22	20	38	7	4	4
RS	70		2	6	14	34	7	18	20
RS-KM	92		9	25	17	38	2	4	5
RU	62		1	4	9	27	10	10	40

SE	66		1	4	3	8	16	13	56
SI	71		2	15	8	26	6	8	35
SK	77		9	25	10	15	5	11	25
TR	99		17	19	3	29	3	2	26
UA	77		2	10	12	40	9	5	21
EUR	76		5	13	11	26	7	10	28

Modernization theories hold that secularity in contemporary societies is related to increasing levels of economic prosperity. As Inglehart once noted, “the emergence of a sense of security among economically more advanced societies diminishes the need for the reassurance that has traditionally been provided by absolute belief systems, which purport to provide certainty and the assurance of salvation, if not in this world at least in the next.”³⁷ Thus, in economically prosperous and secure societies, people are thought to increasingly emphasize individual well-being, pursuit of quality of life and individual freedom. These characteristics are typically associated with a strong anti-authority sentiment, which is likely to lead to declining levels of confidence in hierarchical institutions.³⁸

Churches, in particular, seem to have suffered from a crisis of institutional authority, revealed by shrinking church attendance and diminishing trust in the church. Nonetheless, when asked directly how much confidence they have in churches, most Europeans still indicate having either a great deal (23%) or quite a lot of confidence (35%) in the church. Populations do differ, however, in this respect. In Georgia, Kosovo, Romania, Turkey, Armenia and Moldova, 80% or more indicated having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the church, whereas in Austria, the Netherlands and Spain, this applied to less than one third, and in the Czech Republic to not more than 20%!

To what extent people sympathize with churches may be revealed from the answers to the question, ‘generally speaking, do you think that your/the church is giving, in your country, adequate answers to...’: ‘the moral problems and needs of the individual’, ‘the problems of family life’, ‘people’s spiritual needs’ and ‘the social problems facing our country today’. In almost all European countries, majorities, large majorities in some cases, expressed the opinion that churches did adequately address people’s spiritual needs. Exceptions were Spain, Belgium, Denmark and the Czech Republic, where somewhat less than half of respondents shared this opinion.

³⁷ Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, p. 80.

³⁸ See also Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

Churches were also associated with satisfaction of moral needs, although less so than with spirituality. The proportions of Europeans indicating that churches gave adequate answers to moral problems ranged from 85% in Lithuania and Georgia to less than 30% in Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, France and the Czech Republic (table 3).

Table 3. People in European countries indicating that the church provides adequate answers to moral problems, family issues, spiritual needs and social problems (%).³⁹

	Moral problems	Family life	Spiritual needs	Social problems
AL	39	30	72	17
AM	58	52	80	40
AT	43	33	55	32
BA	56	41	71	31
BE	30	27	46	24
BG	40	25	57	14
BY	65	45	79	30
CH	38	33	52	29
CY	56	56	66	49
CY-TCC	67	43	77	19
CZ	32	25	50	19
DE	45	38	46	28
DK	29	18	54	14
EE	46	29	66	14
ES	32	30	45	25
FI	44	39	68	26
FR	32	27	57	22
GB-GBN	35	33	64	25
GB-NIR	53	49	77	40
GE	86	83	97	77
GR	45	34	55	25

³⁹ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

HR	41	39	74	28
HU	41	33	61	19
IE	38	31	62	28
IS	49	53	61	39
IT	57	47	78	41
LT	85	74	90	59
LU	35	26	57	28
LV	57	46	74	21
MD	78	71	86	43
ME	51	42	69	32
MK	55	41	66	37
MT	58	59	77	47
NL	37	35	56	33
NO	33	22	51	18
PL	60	55	78	36
PT	55	40	64	32
RO	69	61	88	36
RS	52	41	72	27
RS-KM	77	67	85	63
RU	76	59	76	35
SE	25	13	53	14
SI	38	41	62	25
SK	59	52	77	30
TR	79	68	80	57
UA	81	68	85	31
EUR	52	43	68	32

Overall a minority regarded as adequate the churches' answers on family life (43%) and social problems (32%). Respondents in Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova and Turkey did consider such issues as adequately addressed by the churches, but Swedes, Danes and Bulgarians did not consider this to be so.

Such rank orders do not seem to support the claim that the church's role is most diminished in more prosperous societies, being less so in poorer ones. Albania and Bulgaria, both relatively poor countries, appear to be as secular as wealthier countries and are among Europe's less church-oriented societies.

What the figures do reveal so far is that Europe is far from homogeneous in terms of religiosity or secularity. The Czech Republic, Sweden and Estonia appear to be the most secular in many respects, while Turkey, Kosovo, Malta and Poland seem most traditionally religious. However, it is also clear that Europeans are quite diverse, as the rank orders of countries differ depending on the religious issue concerned.

Seekers and Dwellers: Believing and Belonging

What do the figures reveal about the seekers and dwellers or, using the terminology of Grace Davie, about believing and belonging? It seems that the idea that Europe is secular cannot be substantiated after all. At least, not when we combine church belonging ('do you belong to a religious denomination') with the answers to the question on whether or not people consider themselves a religious person. Combining these two provides four possible combinations: (1) people who are a member of a denomination/church and who are also religious; (2) people who are a member of a denomination/church but are not religious; (3) non-members who are religious; and (4) non-members who are not religious. The non-members who are religious are the 'seekers' or 'believers without belonging'. Church members who consider themselves religious are the 'dwellers'.

The group of believers without belonging, as Davie describes them, or seekers, as Wuthnow would call them, is a very small minority in Europe: about 7% could be regarded as believers without belonging. In Greece and Cyprus this group did not exist at all. According to Berger, Davie and Fokas,⁴⁰ the more common attitude in Europe is 'belonging without believing'. Yet, our findings indicate that this applies to only 15% of Europeans.

Our figures suggest that by far the largest group in Europe is that of 'believing and belonging'. Some 60% of Europeans indicate belonging to a religious denomination and being a religious person. Thus, Europe, West and East, does appear to be religious in terms of both beliefs and church membership.

The Scandinavian countries bear out some of the difficulties mentioned earlier in using church membership as the main indicator of religious belonging. Many Scandinavians consider themselves members of the Lutheran Church. These high levels of church membership can be attributed to the strong historical connection between church and state in

⁴⁰ Berger, Davie, and Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, p. 15.

these countries, where “citizenship implies church membership.”⁴¹ People in the Nordic countries become members of the Lutheran Church at birth.⁴² Church membership is seen almost as a citizen’s duty in these cultures and a way of expressing solidarity with society and its basic values.⁴³ However, as Davie remarks, the persistently high membership rates “[do] not mean, of course, that Nordic populations attend their churches with any frequency....Indeed, they [are among]...the least practicing populations in the world.”⁴⁴ Since the level of actual participation is rather low, membership in these countries is less meaningful than in other countries. Worship attendance therefore seems a fairer indicator of church belonging than membership.

From the combination of being religious or not and attending worship regularly or not a more realistic picture of Europe can be drawn to distinguish dwellers from seekers. Table 4 presents the European pattern in this regard.

Table 4. People in Europe who believe or not and who attend religious services regularly or not (%)⁴⁵

	Not attending + not religious	Attending + not religious	Not attending + Religious	Attending + religious
AL	9		76	15
AM	9	2	50	39
AT	35	2	35	29
BA	5		49	46
BE	39	1	42	18
BG	39	1	45	16
BY	63	5	17	15
CH	38	1	42	19
CY	7	1	41	51
CZ	67	1	20	13
DE	49	2	29	21

⁴¹ Göran Gustafsson, “Religious Change in the Five Scandinavian Countries, 1930-1980,” *Scandinavian Values* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1994), p. 21.

⁴² Jan-Erik Lane and Svante O. Ersson, *European Politics* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 184.

⁴³ Eva Hamberg, *Studies in the Prevalence of Religious Beliefs and Religious Practices in Contemporary Sweden* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1990), p. 39.

⁴⁴ Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 141.

⁴⁵ For country abbreviations see the appendix; source: EVS 2008-2010.

DK	28	1	62	9
EE	58	1	32	9
ES	45	2	31	23
FI	46	0	44	11
FR	58	1	30	11
GB-GBN	53	2	27	18
GB-NIR	30	9	20	42
GE	3		59	39
GR	14	04	46	40
HR	16	1	42	41
HU	45	0	40	15
IE	27	8	18	47
IS	32	1	56	12
IT	13	1	36	51
LT	15	0	58	27
LU	41	2	35	22
LV	23	1	59	17
MD	15	2	56	27
ME	12	0	72	16
MK	15	0	59	26
MT	12	21	7	61
NL	39	0	37	24
NO	53	1	35	12
PL	10	2	17	72
PT	22	3	41	35
RO	13	4	39	44
RS	10	0	68	22
RS-KM	0		49	51
RU	26		59	15
SE	68	1	24	7
SI	28	0	46	26
SK	19	0	35	46
TR	9	2	51	39
UA	14	0	61	25
EUR	28	2	43	28

Least prevalent in Europe is the category of people who do go to church regularly but yet are not religious. This applies to less than 2% of Europeans, in most countries making up only 1% or 2% of the population. An exception is Malta, where one in every five persons report going to church without being religious. This is perhaps due to social pressure, but it nevertheless indicates that churchgoers in Malta are markedly different from those in other European countries. In other European countries this combination of churchgoing and not being religious hardly occurs.

The combination of not going to church and not being religious applies to almost 28% of Europeans on average. However, in Estonia, France, Great Britain and Norway, it appears to apply to more than half of respondents, and to two thirds of those in Sweden, the Czech Republic and Belarus. In Kosovo it is hard to find someone with these characteristics, and in Georgia and Bosnia Herzegovina, the category of people who are not religious and do not go to church frequently, or are religiously indifferent, was less than 5%.

Belonging and believing appears to apply to 28% of Europeans as well. These 'dwellers' represent the traditional image of religion, and many people in Poland, Malta, Cyprus, Kosovo and Italy comply with the characteristics of this type. More than half of the people in these countries not only consider themselves religious, but also frequently attend religious services. On the other hand, in Nordic European countries, less than 10% of the people can be considered dwellers.

Seekers are distinguished as people who consider themselves religious but do not attend religious services regularly. This combination applies to some 42% of Europeans, and concerns more than half of the people in Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Denmark and Ukraine. It is thus a common category throughout Europe, with Malta being the main exception. In Malta this applied to about 7% of the population.

Our analysis thus reveals that believing without belonging, tapped by church attending, is a substantial phenomenon in Europe, while belonging without believing represents only a very small minority. The category of religiously indifferent people is similar in size to the traditional believers, in other words, religious people who attended church regularly. These figures also demonstrate that, as regards religiosity, Europe appears to be quite heterogeneous.

EUROPE AND THE REST

How does European religiosity differ from that in other parts of the modern world? We consider here Europe in comparison with three modern countries: the United States, Canada and Australia.

For our comparisons we distinguish Western Europe (Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy,

Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain and Northern Ireland) from Central Europe (Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Macedonia and Kosovo), the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine) and Turkey and Northern Cyprus, and compare the religious patterns of these four 'regions' with those of the United States, Canada and Australia.

The data do not allow us to compare all of the indicators examined earlier in this chapter. The WVS fieldwork included fewer items to tap religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, some indicators reveal the same results. Americans appear indeed far more religious than Europeans and people in Australia and Canada. The comparisons also reveal that Australia is the most secular region, more secular even than Europe! Thus, the rest of the world does not seem to be bubbling with religion or religiosity, as Berger⁴⁶ claimed in his Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture in 2000, at least not the parts of the modern world investigated here.

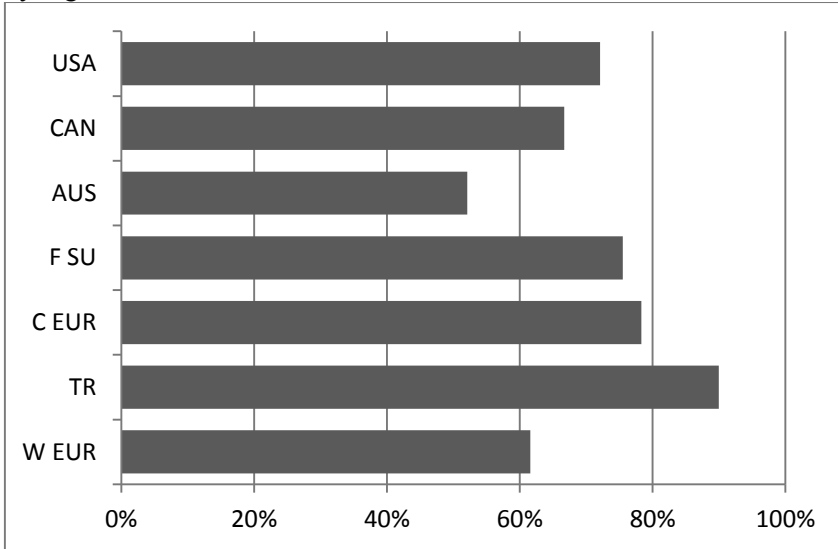
What do our data reveal? When it comes to religious beliefs, Americans appear to be more religious in all respects than Europeans, but also in comparison with Canadians and Australians. It is not the United States, however, but Turkey that emerges as the most religious society (figure 6).

Most people (72%) in the United States consider themselves religious, while in Australia only a small majority (52%) indicate being religious. People in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union resemble each other in this respect. Large majorities in these ex-communist countries regard themselves as religious. Despite the atheistic doctrine of the communist regimes, only a small minority of about 3% of the people in the former Soviet Union indicate being convinced atheists. As Bruce argues, secularity was imposed in these communist countries and unsupported by large shares of the population.⁴⁷ Our analyses seem to confirm this.

⁴⁶ Peter Berger, "Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today," *Sociology of Religion* 62, 4 (2001), pp. 443-454.

⁴⁷ Bruce, *Secularization*, p. 12.

Figure 6. Percentages of populations who consider themselves religious, by region.⁴⁸



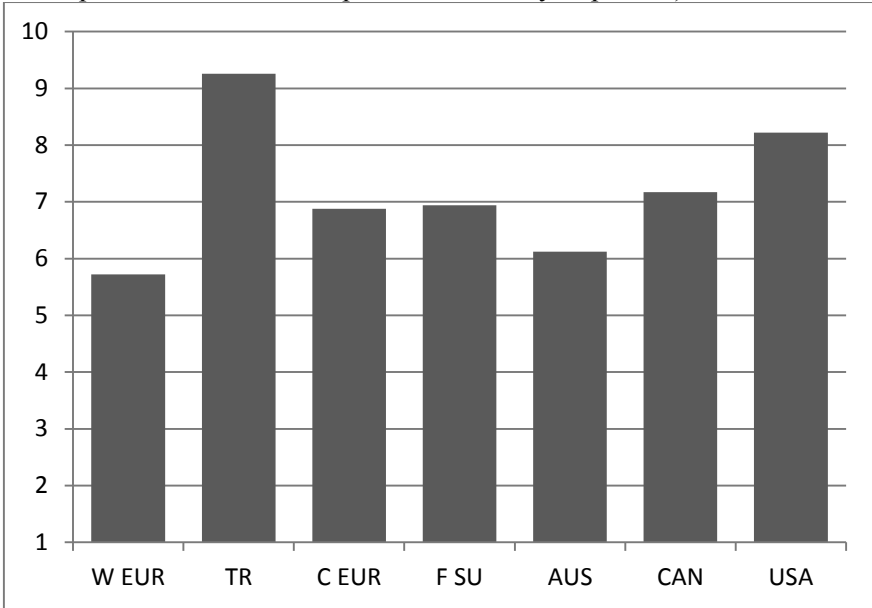
Canadians are indeed in between the very religious Americans and the more secular Western Europeans. This confirms the conclusion of Berger et al. that Canada is one of the English-speaking dominions that lies religiously between the European and the American cases, with Australia, another English-speaking dominion, being the most secular⁴⁹ (figure 7).

When it comes to the importance of god in people's lives, it appears that god is least important to Western Europeans and much more important to those in the United States. In this respect, Americans more closely resemble their neighbors in Canada. Again, Australians consider god less important, while the ex-communist countries, both Central European and former Soviet Union, appear rather similar in the degree to which they consider god to be important. However, the mean country scores on this 10-point scale where (1) means 'not important' and (10) indicates 'very important' do not support the idea that god is unimportant in Europe and other parts of the world. For all regions, mean scores are higher or much higher than 5, so for most people god is (still) rather important.

⁴⁸ Regions are the United States, Canada, Australia, the former Soviet Union, Central Europe, Turkey and Western Europe; Sources: EVS 2008-2010; WVS 2005-2009.

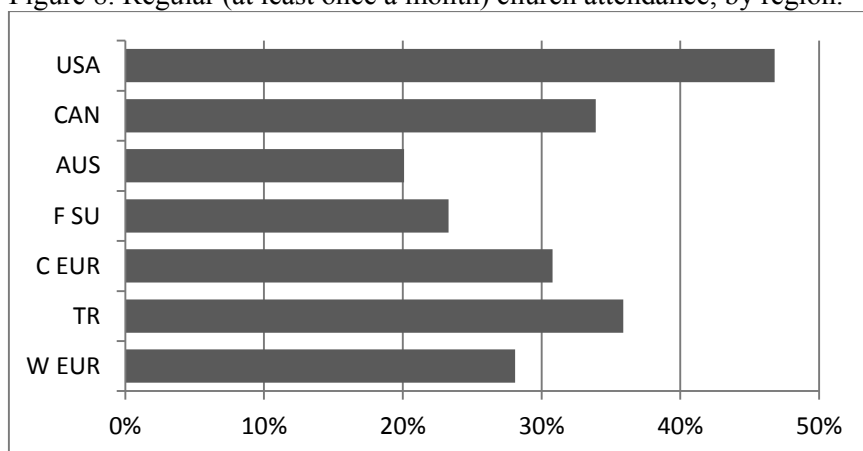
⁴⁹ Berger, Davie, and Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, p. 37.

Figure 7. Importance of religion in people's lives, by region (mean scores on 10-point scale: 1 = not important, 10 = very important).⁵⁰



Significant differences were also found regarding church attendance. Though worship was by far the highest among people in the United States, this does not imply that the majority of Americans attend religious services regularly. In the United States, less than half of the population attended religious services at least once a month. In Europe, about one in every four respondents went to church on a regular basis. Citizens of the former Soviet Union states went to church less frequently than Central Europeans did. Canadians were again in between the Americans and the Western Europeans, and Australians again emerged as the most secular; just 20% of Australians participated in religious services at least monthly (figure 8).

⁵⁰ Note: Regions are Western Europe, Turkey, Central Europe, the former Soviet Union, Australia, Canada and the United States; Sources: EVS 2008-2010; WVS 2005-2009.

Figure 8. Regular (at least once a month) church attendance, by region.⁵¹

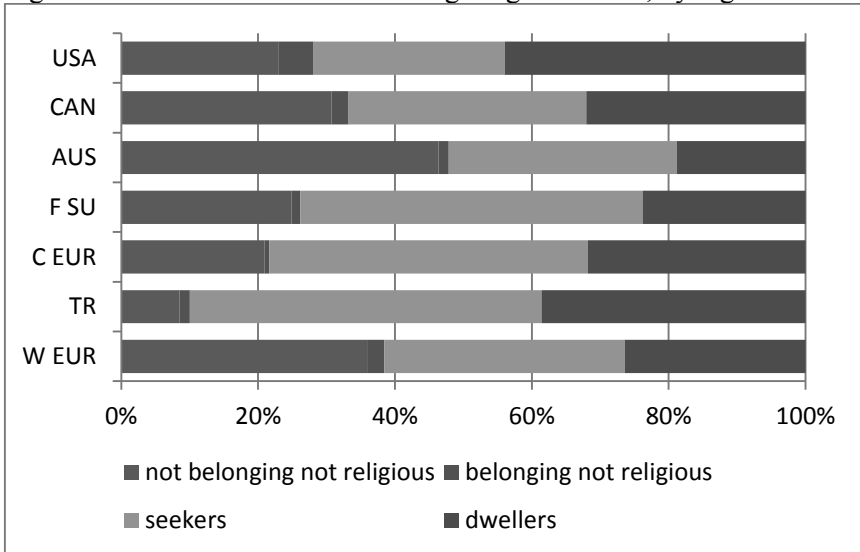
How substantial are the groups of dwellers and seekers in European countries compared with the other modernized countries? The most recent WVS data offer no information on membership of religious denominations, so we cannot investigate this question by combining church adherence with religious beliefs. Instead we combine church attendance with the answers to the question of whether or not people regard themselves as religious. As already noted, the claim that Europe is secular cannot be substantiated. About one in every three Western Europeans can be characterized as secular, while the majority were found to be either dwellers (28%) or seekers (35%). In Europe, there appears to be relatively more dwellers in Turkey and Central Europe than in Western Europe and the former Soviet Union. In the United States, relatively more people can be classified as dwellers (44%) than in Europe, but there are relatively fewer seekers (28%). Furthermore, the group of secular people in the United States is smaller than that in Europe. Some 23% of Americans were found to be irreligious and not churchgoing. In Europe this is 28%, ranging from 34% in Western Europe to about 9% in Turkey. So, being secular is not exclusively reserved for Europeans. It is also a common phenomenon among Americans. Australia appears to be the most secular. There the group of persons who does not belong and is not religious is by far the largest, including almost half of the Australians. One in every three Australians was seeking, while just one in every six Australians was still dwelling. Half of the people in the ex-communist countries can be considered seekers, and only about 25% in these

⁵¹ Regions are the United States, Canada, Australia, the former Soviet Union, Central Europe, Turkey and Western Europe; Sources: EVS 2008-2010; WVS 2005-2009.

countries appear to be secular. Canada is, as so often, in between Europe and the United States.

As figure 9 shows, the category of belonging without believing is negligible in all regions.

Figure 9. Church attendance and being religious or not, by region.⁵²



So far, our results seem to confirm that the United States is an exception to the ‘rule’ that modernization leads to secularization. The religious profiles of other modern societies, such as Canada and Australia, resemble the European profile. The profiles of the ex-communist regions resemble each other and reveal that communism did not destroy religion. Whether or not there has been a religious revival in that part of Europe is the subject of the next section.

SOME RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN EUROPE, CANADA, AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

For a few indicators, trends since the 1980s can be displayed. One must realize, however, that these trends over 30 years can be calculated only for a limited number of countries. The first EVS wave was conducted in a relatively small number of countries: the member states of the European Community. The second wave included more countries, and the third wave included all of the current European Union member states. The last

⁵² Regions are the United States, Canada, Australia, the former Soviet Union, Central Europe, Turkey and Western Europe; Sources: EVS 2008-2010; WVS 2005-2009.

wave, conducted in 2008, covered the whole European continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural. This most recent wave also introduced better measures to tap nonconventional, contemporary forms of religiosity. Items about spirituality were first incorporated in the latest EVS wave, hence comparisons of these over time are not possible.

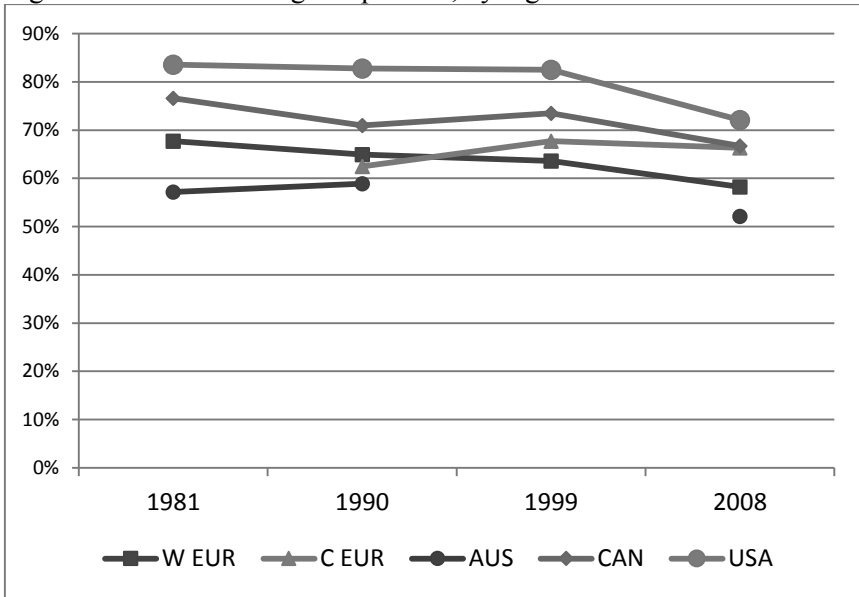
Trends since 1981 can be explored for 13 countries in Western Europe. Norway was in the first wave in 1981, but did not take part in the 1999 survey. Trends since 1981 in Western Europe can therefore be explored for the following countries only: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany (note that in 1981 this concerned only West Germany, though since 1990 Germany has included both West and East), Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Central European countries that can be compared since 1990 are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. Among the former Soviet Union societies, only the Baltic States have been in the surveys since 1990. For Australia we have no data for 1999, but data are available for Canada and the United States for all four waves since 1981. Unfortunately the last WVS survey wave included very few religious indicators.

First we focus on religious beliefs. Our analyses reveal that a secularizing process is also under way in the United States. From 1999 to 2008 the number of religious Americans declined. Though from 1981 to 1999 the percentage of religious people remained rather stable at somewhat more than 80%, from 1999 to 2008 it fell to 72%. In Canada we see more or less the same trends, but at a somewhat lower level (figure 10). In Western Europe the number of religious persons declined more steadily, while the figures for Central Europe seem to demonstrate a religious revival after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In particular, from 1990 to 1999 the number of religious people increased in these countries, but it did not change significantly thereafter. Tomka forecast that the religious revival in ex-communist countries would come to an end, because the younger age cohorts in these countries were less religious.⁵³ Generation replacement would thus imply a secularization trend in these countries.

Despite the more or less uniform pattern of gradual decline, it must be concluded that majorities of the people in all regions investigated remain religious in some form.

⁵³ Tomka, *Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe*.

Figure 10. Trends in religious persons, by region.⁵⁴

Similar trends were found with regard to the importance of god. This was rather stable in most parts of the world, though the importance of god did increase slightly in the ex-communist countries. The pattern with the United States as the most religious is again substantiated, and Canada is in between the level of the United States and Europe. The figures also reveal that for large proportions of people in all of the counties investigated, god is still important (figure 11).

More significant are the trends in church attendance. Everywhere, including the United States, the last decade witnessed a significant decline in numbers of people attending religious services at least once a month (figure 12). These figures support the conclusion of Bruce that “while US churches remain more popular than their European counterparts, church adherence in the USA has declined markedly since the 1950s.”⁵⁵

Worship in Australia was low – lower even than in Europe – and remains low. It also declined in Canada. The brief increase in church attendance in Central Europe ceased in the first decade of this century. Could these figures imply that those claiming that secularization is a European phenomenon are wrong, and that secularization theorists are right?

⁵⁴ Regions are Western Europe, Central Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States; Sources: EVS 1981-2010; WVS 1999-2009.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *Secularization*, p. 159.

Figure 11. Trends in importance of god, by region (mean scores on 10-point scale: 1 = not important, 10 = very important).⁵⁶

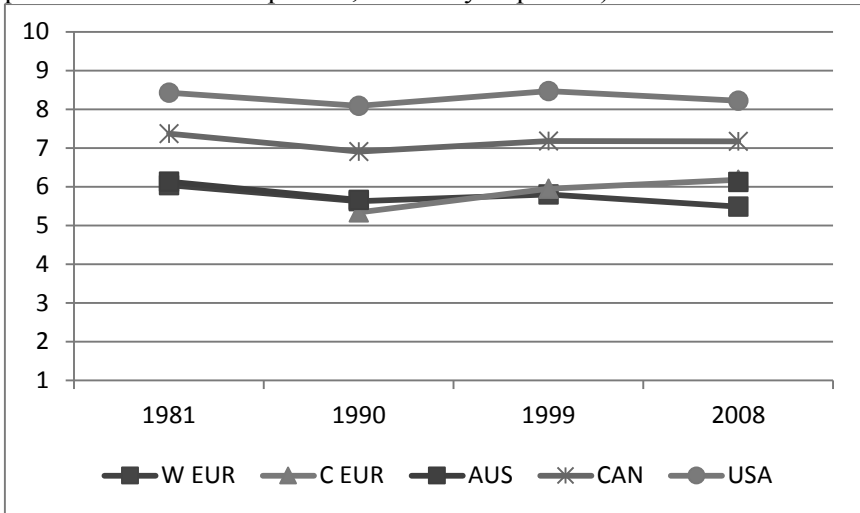
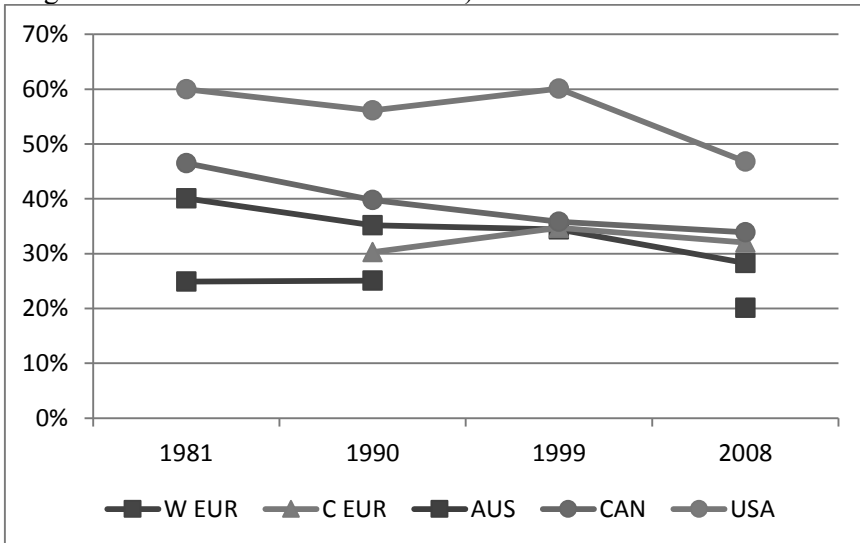


Figure 12. Trends in church attendance by region (people who attend religious services at least once a month).⁵⁷



⁵⁶ Regions are Western Europe, Central Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States; Sources: EVS 1981-2010; WVS 1999-2009.

⁵⁷ Regions are Western Europe, Central Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States; Sources: EVS 1981-2010; WVS 1999-2009.

In the ex-communist countries church attendance has actually increased since 1990. Others have found similar results⁵⁸ and concluded that despite state-imposed atheism, religiosity did not disappear in that part of Europe.⁵⁹ According to Hormel, not expressing one's religious identity was merely a means to avoid scrutiny or to gain status.⁶⁰ Tomka argues, "Communism undeniably weakened the churches and the institutional and official forms of religiosity, but it also contributed to the growth of informal religious life."⁶¹ The end of the communist regimes made it possible for religion and the churches to re-emerge and become a factor "impossible to ignore in public life."⁶² In the years immediately after the collapse of the communist regimes, many Eastern Europeans turned to religion for inspiration, support, guidance and even security. Yet, our data show that over the past decade, church attendance declined slightly in these Central European countries.

Again we focus on the combination of church religion and being religious. Because we are limited by our data we have to rely on the combination of church attendance and religiosity. Those who attended religious services frequently, that is, at least once a month, and who considered themselves religious were categorized as dwellers. Opposite them are the non-believers who seldom or never went to church. In between there is a group of people who believe but did not go to church. As we saw, this describes seekers: people who consider themselves to be religious but are nonetheless not integrated into a religious institution. Finally, there is a curious group of people who go to church regularly, but do not consider themselves religious. Apparently their churchgoing is motivated by reasons other than religiosity. This was a small group, however, and remains very small. We expected an increase in the group of seekers and a decline in the group of dwellers.

In Australia the group of non-religious and not attending people increased from about 10% in 1981 to almost 50% in 2008. In Western Europe, Canada and the United States this group also grew, particularly in the last decade, while in Central Europe it declined in the 1990s and

⁵⁸ Tomka, *Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe*; Siniša Zrinščak and Krunoslav Nikodem, "Why, At All, Do We Need Religion? Religion and Morality in Post-Communist Europe," *Church and Religion in Contemporary Europe* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), pp. 13-24.

⁵⁹ See also Branko Ančić and Siniša Zrinščak, "Religion in Central European Societies. Its Social Role and People's Expectations," *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 5, 1 (2012), p. 22.

⁶⁰ Leontina M. Hormel, "Atheism and Secularity in the Former Soviet Union", *Atheism and Secularity. Volume 2. Gobar Expressions* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger 2010), pp. 50-52.

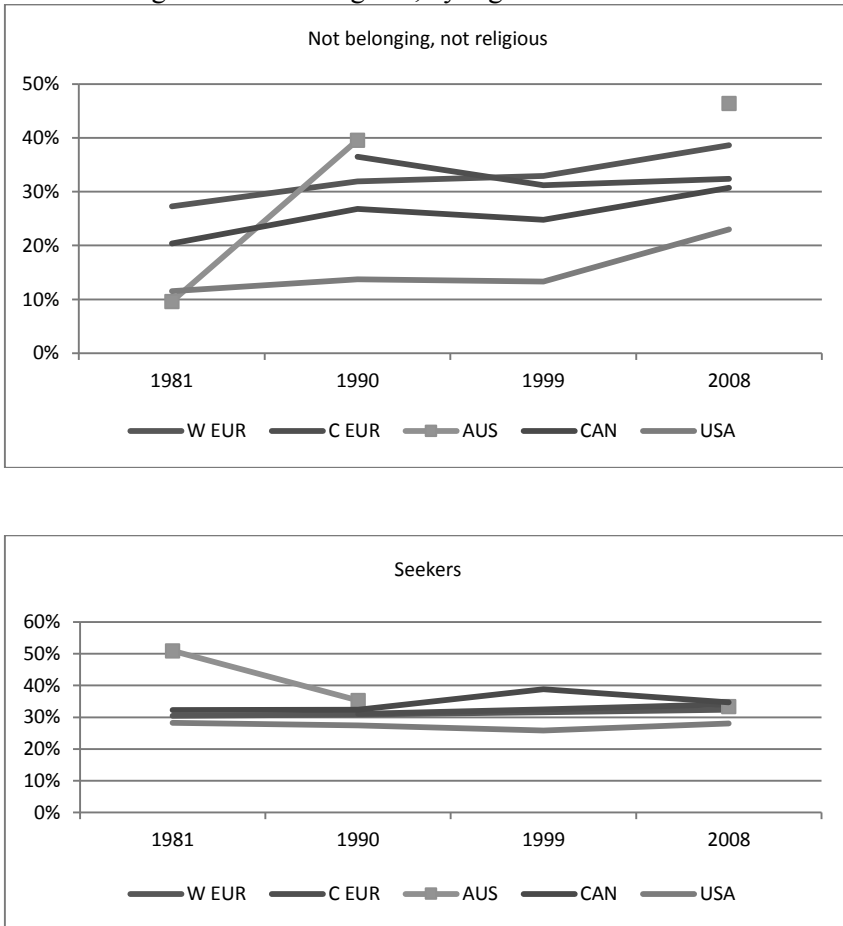
⁶¹ Tomka, *Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe*, p. 16.

⁶² Tomka, *Expanding Religion*, p. 2.

stabilized thereafter. Although this was not a majority group in any of the regions or countries investigated, the slow increases do seem to provide some evidence that secularization is not a phenomenon confined to Europe.

The group of seekers has hardly changed since 1981, except in Australia, where this proportion dropped between 1981 and 1990. It remained about one third of the people in all of the regions investigated. The differences between the countries are not very significant (figure 13).

Figure 13. Trends in percentages of people who are seekers and those who do not belong and are not religious, by region.⁶³

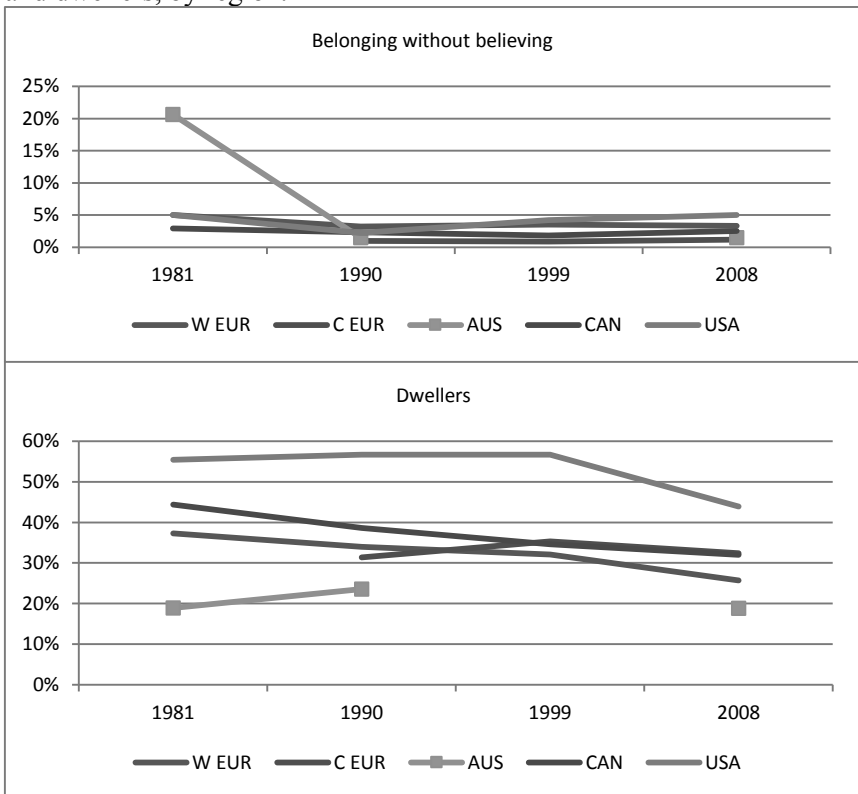


⁶³ Regions are Western Europe, Central Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States; Sources: EVS 1981-2010; WVS 1999-2009.

The group that belongs without believing remains very small in all regions. These proportions hardly changed over time, Australia being the exception in the 1980s (figure 14). Of course, belonging in this analysis is taken to mean participation in church worship.

Regarding those who belong and believe, ‘dwellers’, we see small declines in most regions. The figures for Central Europe seem to demonstrate a resurgence of religion in this part of Europe after the decline of communism. More recent years, however, witnessed a stabilizing of the group of dwellers there, and even somewhat of a decline. Also in the United States, the group of religious churchgoers appears to be on the decline, from 55% in 1981 to 42% in 2008. As such, these figures confirm the observations of Bruce that the United States is becoming more secular.⁶⁴ Secularization is not a process characteristic of Europe alone.

Figure 14. Trends in percentages of people who belong without believing and dwellers, by region.⁶⁵



⁶⁴ Bruce, *Secularization*.

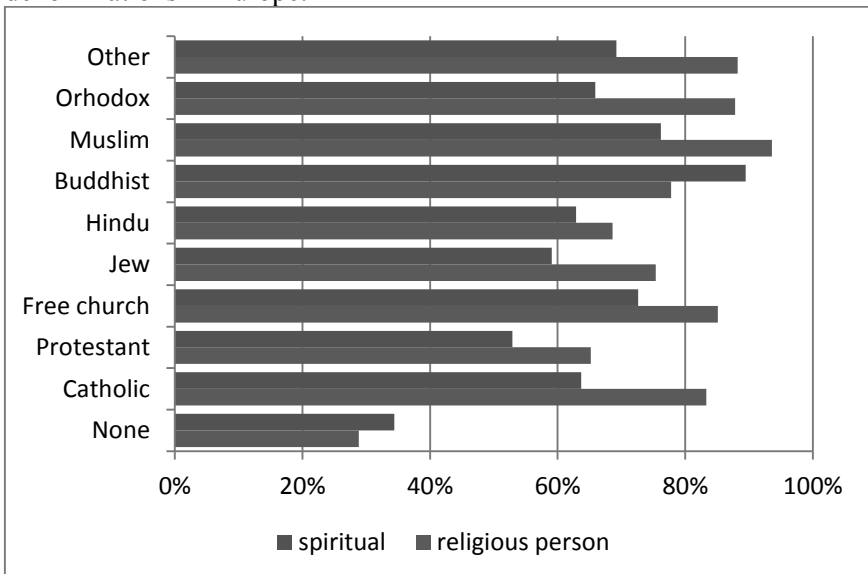
⁶⁵Regions are Western Europe, Central Europe, Australia, Canada and the United State; Sources: EVS 1981-2010; WVS 1999-2009.

CATHOLICS' RELIGIOSITY AND RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT

What about Catholics? Might Catholics differ in their religious beliefs and practices from the Protestants and other religious groups? That issue will be addressed in this section. Before doing so, we must note that selection of Catholics in Europe for investigation also implies the selection of populations of certain countries. Catholics are mainly found in Southern Europe, whereas Northern Europe is mainly Protestant; Orthodox religions are found mainly in Central and Eastern Europe and in Greece, and most Muslim EVS respondents are mainly found in Turkey and Kosovo. In a few countries, namely the Netherlands, France and Great Britain, there are large numbers of unchurched people, and together with Great Britain and Germany, the Netherlands is the only country with a mixture of Catholics and Protestant groups.

To what extent are Catholics special when it comes to their beliefs and practices? Well, they are not so special! Some 83% of Catholics consider themselves to be religious. That number may seem high, but it is equivalent to that among members of the Free Churches and somewhat lower than those for the Orthodox and Muslim groups. Among Catholics, 63% consider themselves to be spiritual. This is similar to what the Orthodox and Hindu people say (figure 15).

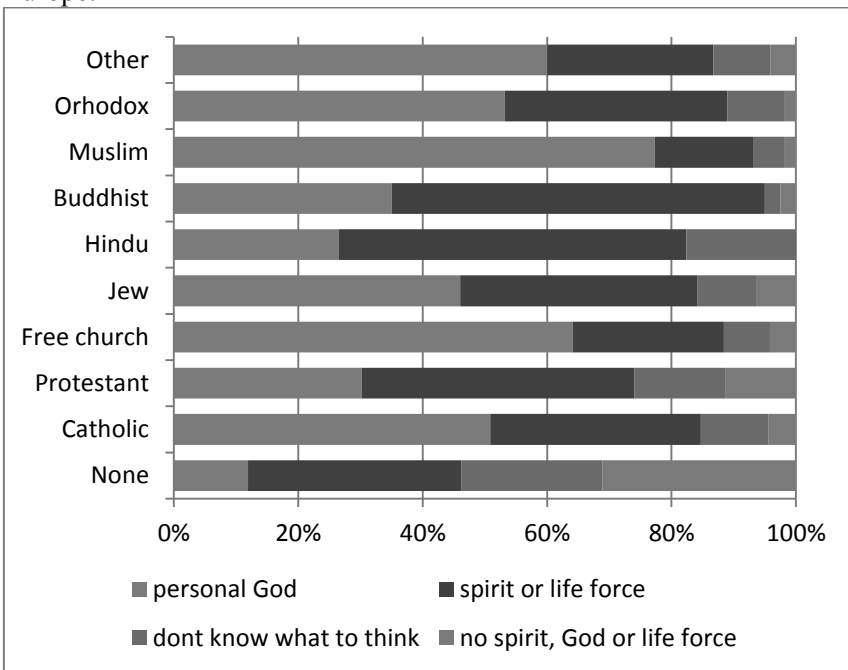
Figure 15. Spirituality and religiosity among members of various denominations in Europe.⁶⁶



⁶⁶ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Half of the Catholics claimed to believe in a personal god. A similar percentage was found among Orthodox Europeans. Muslims scored higher in this regard. One in every three Catholics indicate belief in some sort of spirit or life force, again similar to Orthodox Europeans (figure 16). This is, of course, a higher percentage than found among Muslims. It resembles the percentage among unchurched people, revealing that being unchurched (the ‘none’ category in figure 15) does not necessarily imply denial of the existence of a spirit, god or life force. Such denial does apply to one in every three persons who did not belong to any of the denominations. A slightly larger proportion of the unchurched people indicate believing in a spirit or life force, while one in every nine of the unchurched even believed in a personal god!

Figure 16. Beliefs according to membership of denominations in Europe.⁶⁷

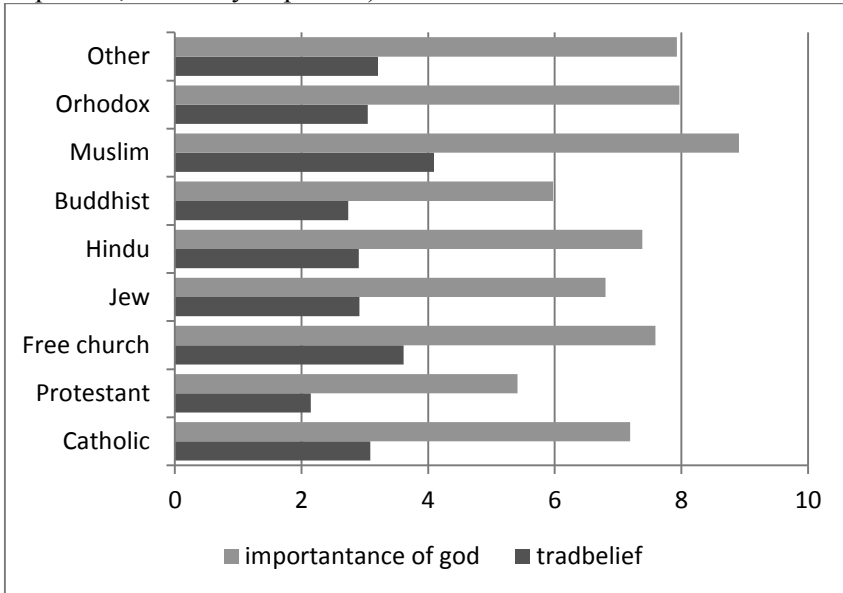


Neither are Catholics exceptional among the traditional beliefs. In fact, they resemble Orthodox believers. This appears in figure 17, which displays mean scores based on summing the responses to the belief statements regarding god, life after death, hell, heaven and sin. Members of the Free Churches in Europe appear to be more traditionally religious than the Catholics, while European Protestants appear to be the most

⁶⁷ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

secular religious group. Muslims scored highest on what we call traditional religiosity. Furthermore, for them god is more important than for the other denominational groups, followed by Orthodox. God is least important to Protestants. Among Catholics, god is somewhat more important than for Buddhists and Jewish people in Europe.

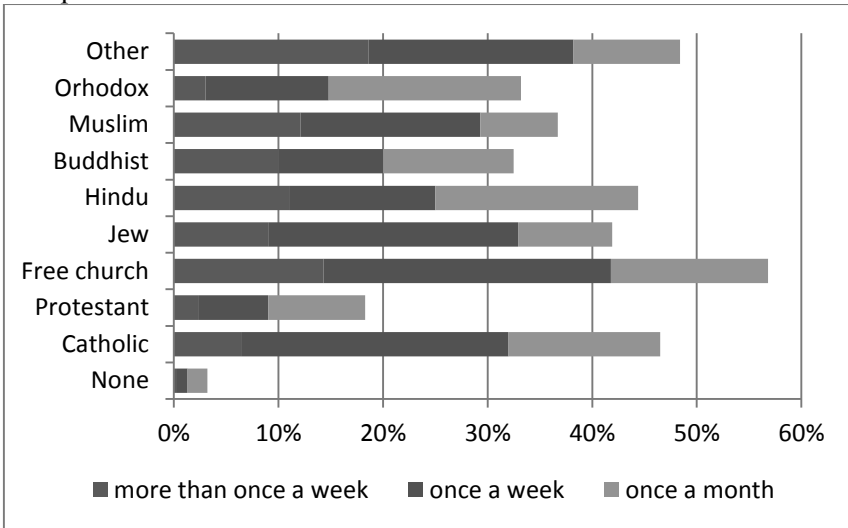
Figure 17. Traditional beliefs and importance of god among members of denominations in Europe (mean scores on 10-point scale: 1 = not important, 10 = very important).⁶⁸



When it comes to religious involvement and church attachment, Catholics in Europe are among the more active religious groups. Monthly church attendance is higher among Catholics than any of the other religious groups, also much higher than church attendance among Orthodox people. However, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and members of the Free Churches often go to church (or a mosque) more than once a week. Weekly church attendance among Catholics is as high as that among members of the Free Churches and the Jews. Almost half of the Catholics report attending religious services on a more or less regular basis, slightly less than members of the Free Churches (figure 18).

⁶⁸ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Figure 18. Frequency of worship among religious denominations in Europe.

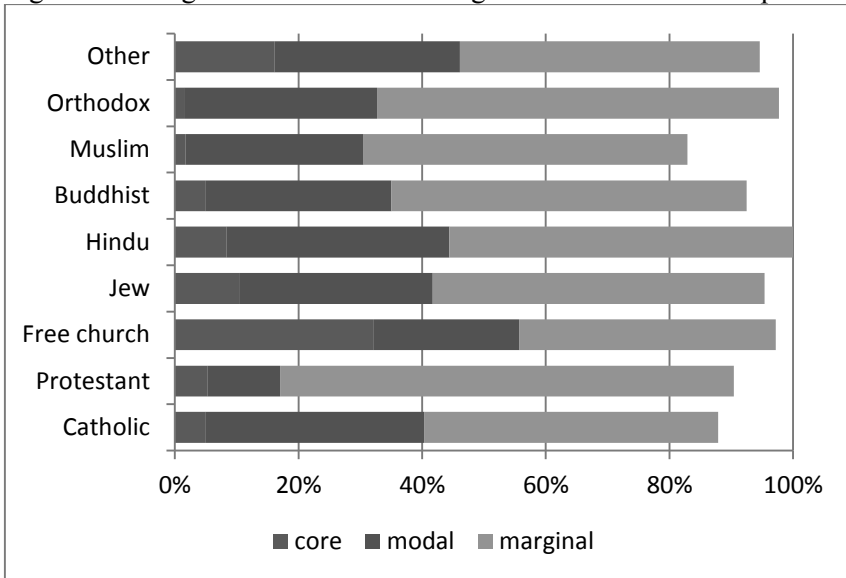


Felling, Peters and Schreuder⁶⁹ developed a cumulative scale of church involvement based on survey data collected in the so-called SOCON project for the Netherlands. Although our data do not contain exactly the same indicators, it is possible to distinguish various levels of church involvement. We define as ‘core members’ people who indicate being a member of a denomination, attending religious services regularly (at least once a month) and otherwise being actively involved in religious/church activities (e.g., doing voluntary work for a religious organization). ‘Modal members’ are labeled as church members who attend religious services regularly but are otherwise not involved in religious activities. ‘Marginal members’ are defined as church members who do not regularly attend religious services or otherwise take active part in a religious or church organization.

Figure 19 presents the distribution of religious involvement among the various denominations. Many Catholics appear to be marginal members of their church, rather than core or modal members. In this, Catholics are similar to members of other denominations. Nonetheless, the percentage of marginal members is lower among Catholics than among other denominations. While almost half of the Catholics qualify as marginal members, much higher figures were found among Protestants (73%!) and Orthodox Europeans (65%).

⁶⁹ Felling, Peters, and Schreuder, *Dutch Religion*; see also Billiet, “Proposal for questions on religious identity.”

Figure 19. Religious involvement among denominations in Europe.⁷⁰



A much smaller share of the Catholics can be regarded modal members. One in every three Catholics in Europe appears to attend religious services at least once a month. Some 5% of Catholics appear to be core members, resembling the Protestant and Buddhist patterns. The largest group of core members is found among members of the Free Churches. Among them one in every three can be regarded as a core member.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SEEKERS, DWELLERS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS TYPES

It is not surprising to find that religious churchgoers are also more interested in the sacred and the supernatural, or in other words, that traditional believers, or dwellers, are spiritual. Less obvious is that even among the category of people who go to church but do not consider themselves religious, a majority is spiritual and that being religious without belonging for many means being spiritual. This is revealed in figure 20, which presents the percentages of Europeans who are very or somewhat interested in the sacred or the supernatural. We see that the seekers are to a large extent also spiritual or at least interested in the sacred or the supernatural. Even among the non-religious, non-churchgoers 29% indicated being interested in the sacred or the supernatural.

⁷⁰ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Figure 20. Percentages of religious types in Europe who indicate being very or somewhat interested in the sacred or the supernatural.⁷¹

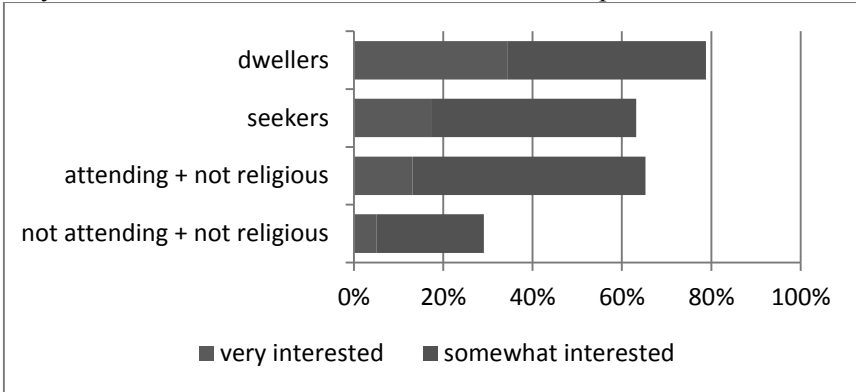
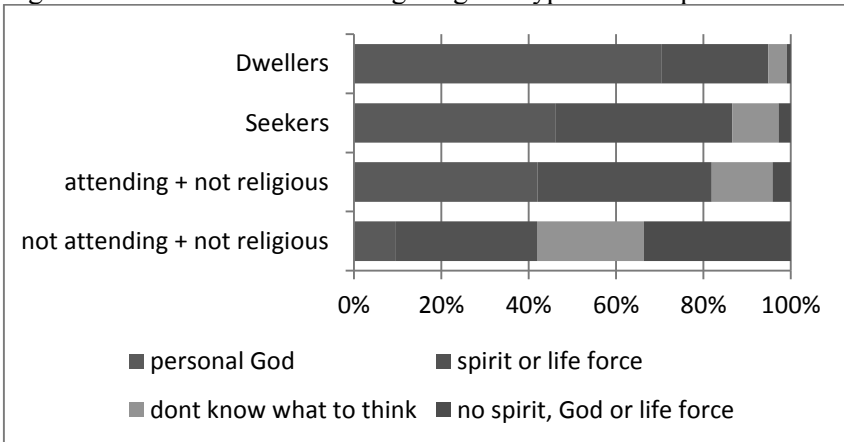


Figure 21 reveals that two out of every five non-religious non-churchgoers do, nonetheless, believe in a personal god or in a supernatural force! Slightly more than 30% of this non-religious group appears nihilist in the sense that they deny the existence of any sort of spirit, god or life force. Some 70% of the dwellers believe in a personal god, and this also applies to more than 40% of those who go to church without believing and believers who do not go to church (the seekers).

Figure 21. Kinds of beliefs among religious types in Europe.⁷²



The main differences manifest between the irreligious non-churchgoers and the other belief categories. Majorities of the respondents who indicate being religious appear to believe in either a god or a supernatural force,

⁷¹ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

⁷² Source: EVS 2008-2010.

while among those who were not religious and did not go to church this percentage was 40%. Churchgoers emerge as the most traditional believers in the sense that they, more than other groups, believe in a personal god. The believers who did not go to church did not differ much with regard to their way of believing from the very small group of respondents who did attend religious services regularly but did not consider themselves religious. Of course, it should be realized that that latter group consists largely of people from Malta!

Our results are similar with regard to the importance of god. Fewer of the non-religious non-churchgoers indicate that they consider god to be important compared to the other types. These others are fairly similar in the importance they attach to god. On a 10-point scale where (1) means that god is not at all important and (10) means that god is very important, mean scores vary from 7.12 for those who are not religious but do go to church rather regularly to 7.28 for the seekers and 8.79 for the dwellers (those who do go to church regularly and are religious). Again the dwellers emerge as the most traditional believers, but they hardly differ from the other believers and/or churchgoers. The largest differences are found between the non-believers and the others (table 5).

Table 5. Importance of god in people's lives according to the belief categories (mean scores on 10-point scale 1 = god is not important; 10 = god is very important).⁷³

	Importance of god in life
Not attending + not religious	2.95
Attending + not religious	7.12
Not attending + religious	7.28
Attending + religious	8.79

The dwellers correspond with traditional believing. The seekers, defined as believers who do not go to church regularly, appear to be almost equally religious, and the same can be said for those who attend religious services frequently but do not consider themselves religious. As we have seen, that last group includes many people from Malta. Religiously, these groups do not differ much. They do, however, differ from the non-religious group of people who hardly go to church and do not consider themselves religious.

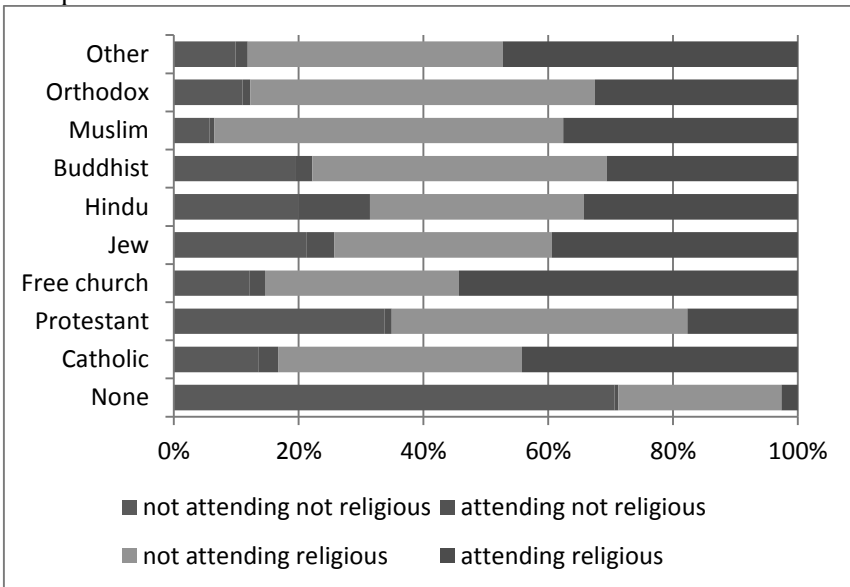
Are the Catholics seekers or dwellers? From figure 22 it is clear that many Catholics are dwellers. Most Catholics (83%) appear to be religious, and among those, 53% regularly attend religious services. Hence, 44% of the Catholics can be categorized as dwellers. Another 46% of the religious Catholics were not regular churchgoers. Hence, 39% of

⁷³ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

the Catholics qualifies as a seeker. About 17% of the Catholics did not regard themselves as religious, and most of them (80%) did not attend religious services at least monthly.

In this, Protestants differ from Catholics. Protestants go to church less often and appear to be less religious. One in every three (33%) Protestants was not religious and did not go to church regularly. However, almost half the Protestants can be classified as seekers, that is, Protestant believers without religious involvement and institutional engagement. Orthodox people, too, are to a large extent seeking. About 55% of the Orthodox people belong to this group of not institutionally tied but religious people.

Figure 22. Religious types among the different religious denominations in Europe.⁷⁴



CATHOLIC EUROPE

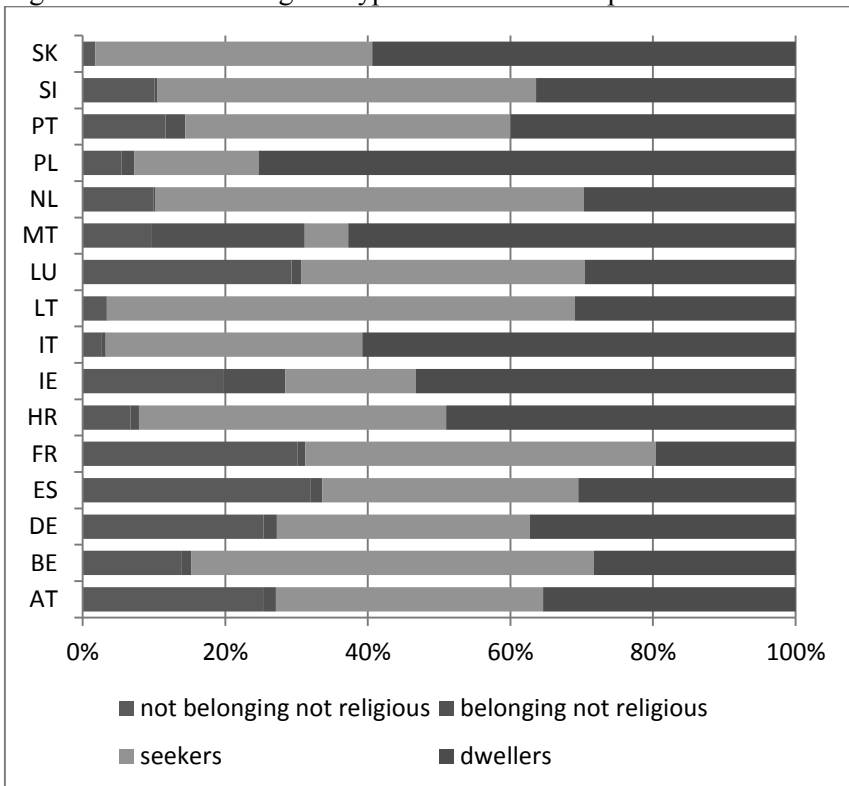
So far we have looked at Catholics in Europe and compared them with other religious groups. Large majorities of the European Catholics were found to be either dwellers or seekers, but this general picture of Catholics does no justice to the variety of religious patterns found in the different Catholic countries. To better understand these, we selected only countries with a large share of Catholics (more than half of the sample; also the

⁷⁴ Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Netherlands where it concerns more than half of the churched people). Figure 23 presents the results.

The belief profile of European Catholics described in the previous section applies in particular to the Catholics in Portugal and Croatia. These two countries have similar proportions of Catholics who are not only religious but also go to church frequently. Most Catholics in Lithuania and the Netherlands are seekers, while a majority of the Catholics in Italy, Malta and Poland appear to be dwellers. Catholics in Malta are, again, an exceptional case in Europe. Some 21% of Maltese Catholics go to church frequently but do not consider themselves religious. Apparently they attend church for other reasons, such as perhaps social pressure or simply out of habit, to meet others or to enjoy the music and rituals. In the rest of Catholic Europe, this combination of regular church attendance without believing hardly exists.

Figure 23. Catholic religious types in selected European countries.⁷⁵

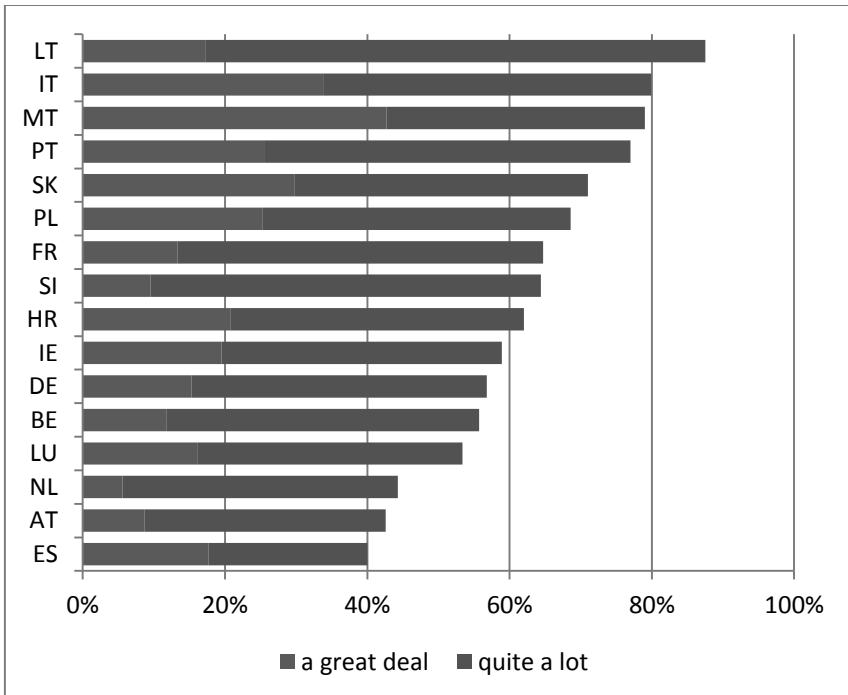


⁷⁵ For country abbreviations see the appendix; Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Catholics in France, Luxembourg and Spain and to a lesser extent in Austria and Germany are for a large part not religious and not very tied to their religious community. These Catholics appear to be religiously indifferent. However, religious indifference is rare among Catholics in most of the other countries.

Most European Catholics have confidence in their church. Throughout Europe, one fourth of the Catholics indicated having very much confidence in their church and another 43% had much confidence. Again, European Catholics' confidence in their church varied widely between countries. Confidence in the Catholic Church was highest in Lithuania, Italy, Malta and Portugal, where about 80% of the Catholics claimed to have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in their church. Catholics in Spain, Austria and the Netherlands trusted their church to a much lesser extent. In the latter countries, about 40% of the Catholics indicated having much or very much confidence in the church. In most countries confidence in the church had declined among Catholics, but in Slovenia in particular and also in Italy, confidence in the church increased slightly from 1990 to 2008.

Figure 24. Confidence in church among Catholics in selected European countries.⁷⁶



⁷⁶ For country abbreviations see the appendix; Source: EVS 2008-2010.

Catholics in Spain, Austria and the Netherlands also took the guidance of Catholic churches less seriously than those in Lithuania and Slovakia, where more than half of the Catholics expressed the opinion that the church gave adequate answers on three or four of the issues mentioned (moral problems, family life, social problems and spiritual needs). In the Netherlands, this applied to one in every five Catholics, and in Spain and Austria to about one in every three Catholics. Since 1990, the Dutch Catholics have come to regard their church more favorably as a source of guidance, and the same applies to the German Catholics, but in other countries fewer Catholics saw their church as a source of guidance in 2008 than in 1990.

CONCLUSION

This descriptive chapter explored some religious indicators and trends among European countries, and also among a few other modern countries, namely the United States, Canada and Australia. The chapter's aims were rather modest; merely to describe contemporary patterns of religious life in European countries and in some other modern societies and to explore trends in religious believing. Especially with regard to our comparisons with other parts of the world, we were seriously constrained by data limitations. Not all religious dimensions that can be distinguished could be measured in all survey waves and all countries. In particular, the data from the WVS for the non-European countries were restricted to only a few indicators. Nevertheless, we hope this chapter has provided readers with a somewhat clearer image of religious Europe, Catholic Europeans and Catholic seekers and dwellers and that the analyses presented invites further reflection on the similarities and diversities found in Europe.

A first conclusion is that Europe is not as secular as often claimed. There are substantially secular regions in Europe, but claiming that Europe as a whole is secular does little justice to Europe's varied pattern of religiosity. Also, the claim that believing without belonging is most characteristic of Europe is not substantiated by our findings in this chapter. In most European countries, much of the population believes either in some sort of spirit or life force or even claims to believe in a personal god. Even though that latter belief seems to have declined somewhat throughout Europe in recent years, people have not become disbelievers.

However, this does not imply that nothing has changed. A decline was registered in what this chapter refers to as dwellers, operationalized as the combination of regular church attendance and considering oneself religious, while the category of Europeans who do not attend religious services on a regular basis but claims to be religious is on the rise. This demonstrates rather clearly that there is not so much a decline of religion

but more an institutional decline. As Berger, Davie and Fokas remarked, “[B]oth Catholic and Protestant churches are in deep trouble in Europe.”⁷⁷ Contemporary Europeans no longer accept the traditional religious authorities, but they remain religious, often even with rather traditional beliefs. As such, our findings substantiate the ideas about postmodernization expressed, for example, by Inglehart.⁷⁸ According to his theory, postmodernization has been conducive to an anti-authority sentiment which has affected all hierarchical institutions, including the churches. Postmodernization refers to the trajectory in which authority shifts “away from both religion and the state to the individual.”⁷⁹ The growing emphasis on the individual and individual pursuit of autonomy puts strain on group loyalty and seems to weaken the plausibility of the traditional religious belief systems and churches.⁸⁰

This growing anti-authoritarian sentiment, however, does not imply that contemporary Europeans have turned their back on religion. God is not dead for modern or postmodern people, even in Europe. There seems to be an institutional crisis, rather than a religious one. This institutional crisis is also evident in declining levels of confidence in the church. In almost all European countries, people trust churches less and less. A cold comfort for the churches and their leaders is that similarly declining levels of trust are also found in other authoritarian institutions.⁸¹

Large majorities of Europeans are religious. Atheism has not become dominant in Europe. Convinced atheism is confined to about 5% of the European population. It is most common in France, Sweden and the Czech Republic. These countries are also among the most secular societies in contemporary Europe. Though belief in a personal god remains widespread across Europe, a gradual shift seems to be taking place from belief in a personal god towards belief in a spirit or life force. Nonetheless, the agnostic and nihilistic worldviews are still in the minority in most European countries.

Grace Davie characterized the religious scene in Europe as believing without belonging, an expression which “rapidly spread across the world and beyond the borders of scholarship.”⁸² We represented this expression empirically by combining frequency of church attendance with people’s perceptions of their own religiosity. Translated as such, believing without belonging appears to apply to about half of the people in Europe.

⁷⁷ Berger, Davie, and Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ Bruce, *Secularization*, p. 201.

⁸¹ See also Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*.

⁸² David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, “Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging,” *Sociology* 39 (2005), pp. 11-12.

However, it is not a typical feature of particular societies, such as Protestant ones, as it appears to also be common among former Yugoslavian and ex-communist countries. Of course, criticisms can be raised of the way we operationalized the various categories of belief, for instance, those we called seekers because they are religious but not institutionally engaged. Regular participation in worship is a better indicator of church integration than church adherence. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that the EVS and WVS provide data on claimed attendance and not actual church attendance. More reliable responses would be obtained from answers to indirect questions such as 'which of the following did you do last weekend' than from direct questions such as 'how often do attend religious services', as was asked in the EVS.⁸³

Nevertheless, the data reveal that seekers, defined as those who believe without belonging, make up a significant proportion of Europeans. Dwellers, defined as frequent churchgoers who are also religious, make up 28% of Europeans, and an equally sized proportion of Europeans can be characterized as religiously indifferent. These latter hardly go to church and do not consider themselves religious. There has been a more or less a steady increase in Europeans who are irreligious and do not go to church. At the same time, the group of dwellers is slowly but steadily declining in Western Europe. If secularization is understood in terms of declining church adherence and religious belief, the process can be substantiated in Europe. But not only there. It also applies to the United States and Canada. As such, Europe is not the exception, as many American sociologists of religion would have us believe.

Catholics do not appear to be an exceptional religious group in contemporary Europe. In many ways they resemble adherents of other religious denominations, in particular Orthodox religions. More than, for example, adherents to the Free Churches, Catholics appear to be mainly marginal church members, meaning that they attend religious services infrequently and are not usually otherwise involved in church activities. The church as an institute appears somewhat less important among Catholics than, for instance, among Orthodox Europeans, who seem more strongly attached to their church.

However, a crucial consideration is where Catholics live. Catholics in the Netherlands are different from Catholics in Poland or Malta. In some countries most Catholics appear to be seekers, whereas in other countries more Catholics appear to be dwellers. What Catholics do have in common is that most of them are religious. Yet, being religious does not imply involvement in church life or high levels of confidence in the church and its leaders. In Italy, for instance, confidence in the church is high among Catholics, and most Italian Catholics do turn to the church for

⁸³ Bruce, *Secularization*, pp. 16-17.

guidance, but for Dutch, Austrian and Spanish Catholics, the church plays a less significant role.

Europe, including Catholic Europe, cannot be said to present a unified front. Rather, the European Union's motto 'United in Diversity' applies to religion and to Catholics as well. Although secularization is transforming societies and Catholic beliefs and religious practices, differences remain. Modernization and secularization seem to come in more than one version, to reiterate a conclusion drawn elsewhere, for example, by Shmuel Eisenstadt, who developed the notion of 'multiple modernities'.⁸⁴ The persistent differences in Europe appear to confirm such ideas. The main challenge for contemporary social scientists and sociologists of religion is to make sense of all these diverse trajectories and developments. Concluding that context matters is one thing, understanding how and why is another thing.

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⁸⁴ Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, 1 (2000), pp. 1-29.

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Appendix. Country names and country abbreviations

Country	Abbreviation
Albania	AL
Armenia	AM
Austria	AT
Belarus	BY
Belgium	BE
Bosnia-Herzegovina	BA
Bulgaria	BG
Croatia	HR
Cyprus	CY
Czech Republic	CZ
Denmark	DK
Estonia	EE
Finland	FI
France	FR
Georgia	GE
Germany	DE
Great Britain	GB-GBN
Greece	GR
Hungary	HU
Iceland	IS
Ireland	IE
Italy	IT
Kosovo	RS-KM
Latvia	LV
Lithuania	LT
Luxembourg	LU
Macedonia	MK
Malta	MT
Moldova	MD
Montenegro	ME
Netherlands	NL
Northern Cyprus	CY-TCC
Northern Ireland	GB-NIR

Norway	NO
Poland	PL
Portugal	PT
Romania	RO
Russia	RU
Serbia	RS
Slovakia	SK
Slovenia	SI
Spain	ES
Sweden	SE
Switzerland	CH
Turkey	TR
Ukraine	UA

CHAPTER II

FLOATING BELIEVERS: DUTCH SEEKERS AND THE CHURCH

JOEP de HART and PAUL DEKKER

INTRODUCTION: FROM DWELLING TO SEEKING

A new attitude to religion appears to have emerged in recent decades. This development is reflected in various ways in the literature. For the second half of the 20th century, Robert Wuthnow observes a gradual shift from *dwelling* to *seeking* in the area of spirituality. Both these notions are present in all great religious traditions, with the former dominating in settled times and the latter in periods of great social change. According to Wuthnow, a ‘spirituality of dwelling’ is associated with physical locations, monasteries, convents and abbeys, and with the accounts of the Garden of Eden and the promised land. We find it in extreme form in the *stabilitas loci* of religious orders: the vow not to leave the convent or abbey.¹ It is a temple religion and flourishes in an era of kings and priests. The spirituality of seeking is a tabernacle religion, the religion of pilgrims and visitors. It is associated with the Diaspora, with prophets and Judges, with mystics in the wilderness and wandering preachers. According to Wuthnow, religious seekers are looking for ‘new spiritual vistas’ and are willing to abandon the safe and familiar territories of the spirituality of dwelling in order to find them.² Colin Campbell also concludes that a major shift has been taking place in recent decades, not so much from religion to irreligion as from religion to seeking behaviour.³

According to Wade Clark Roof, the baby-boom generation and the Generation X which followed it are the principal social carriers of the

¹ Andreas Rüther, “Stabilitas loci,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, part 7 (München/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler-Verlag, 1995), pp. 2162-2163.

² Robert Wuthnow, *After heaven: spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998); cf. Christopher H. Partridge, *The re-enchantment of the West*, part 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

³ Colin Campbell, Some comments on the new religious movements, the new spirituality and post-industrial society, *New religious movements: a perspective for understanding society* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1982), pp. 232-242; cf. Stephen J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the new age* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003).

seeker culture.⁴ These generations grew up in a media-dominated culture, in a multi-layered spiritual landscape surrounded by cultures and religions from all over the world, in the midst of a great plurality of lifestyles. This diversity and dynamic stimulate a reflexive attitude.⁵ Religion comes to be seen more as an option than an unquestioned given. It is regarded as (partly) the result of human creation, open to reinterpretation and new perspectives. Spirituality is interpreted as something dynamic: spiritual interest focuses more on the journey than the destination. The observations by the French religious sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger fit in with this approach. She distinguishes between what she calls 'converts' (*convertis*) and 'pilgrims' (*pèlerins*).⁶ She sees the former group as having opted for a well-defined religion, the latter as being on a journey, in search of more meaning, of a genuine sense-making, perhaps found within themselves. At a time when all manner of traditional religious institutions are crumbling, this last model is becoming increasingly important. It moves away from the idea of conforming to the prescriptions of an organisation or joining mass ritual gatherings in a fixed and predetermined rhythm. Spirituality is something active for these groups; at its heart is the personal spiritual journey of discovery and the sharing of the emotional and religious experiences that brings.

The Dutch situation is no different. Religion in the Netherlands today is less and less about subscribing to set answers to set questions.⁷ The same applies for those who see themselves as belonging to a church; for Catholics, for example, papal encyclicals have lost much of their

⁴ Wade C. Roof, *Spiritual seeking in the United States: report of a panel study*. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 109 (2000): pp. 49-66; cf. *Ibid.*, *A generation of seekers: the spiritual journeys of the baby boom generation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); *Idem*, *Spiritual marketplace: baby boomers and the remaking of American religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); *Idem*, "Religion and spirituality," *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 137-148.

⁵ See also: Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁶ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion en mouvement: le pèlerin et le converti* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999); cf. *Idem*, "Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity," *The Blackwell companion to sociology of religion* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 161-175.

⁷ The American psychologist Daniel Batson uses the term *quest-orientation*; see: Daniel C. Batson and Larry W. Ventis, *The religious experience: a social-psychological perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Daniel C. Batson and Patricia Schoenrade, "Measuring religion as quest: validity concerns," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 30. No. 4 (1991), pp. 416-429; Daniel C. Batson and Patricia Schoenrade, "Measuring religion as quest: reliability concerns," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 30. No. 4 (1991), pp. 430-437.

power in directing people's lives, and the same can be said of the Heidelberg Catechism for Protestants. The Dutch have loosened their ties and it is much less easy to predict their ideology based on the milieu in which they grew up. Fifty years ago, living life from cradle to grave in the same religious milieu was the dominant norm. That is no longer so. Rather than automatically taking on a complete tradition (Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, Humanism), Dutch people today not infrequently spend their whole lives seeking answers to the questions that concern them. Their own, often highly personal experience and some form of emotional engagement have become much more important. What has become less important is the influence of the social setting, the force of habits, the unquestioning following of prescripts, the details of the official church dogma. The emphasis on personal experience and feeling (the psychological side of religion, one might say) is evident everywhere: in the strong rise of 'happy-clappy' churches, such as the Pentecostal communities, in the sales figures of popular self-help and therapy books, in the range of meditation courses on offer, in what is shown on television and in what is written in newspapers and magazines.

For the Dutch, religion has increasingly become a quest.⁸ It is seen as something that can derive from many sources and is something that individuals must seek out for themselves by combining elements from all manner of movements, philosophies and traditions. People draw selectively on the Christian heritage (something they have generally been brought up with), but the personal character of religion is strongly emphasised. It is no longer associated exclusively with a particular group, socio-cultural 'pillar' or collective experience. A new experience of religion appears to be emerging. Truth is something that has to be experienced within. Individuals must discover for themselves what gives them meaning and direction, with their own unique experience as the decisive factor. It could be said that many modern Dutch people like their religion to be like their electronic equipment: portable. Surveys show that around 96% of the Dutch population think that a church is not necessary in order to be religious. They are not in search of a credo, an unshakeable belief, but rather of experience. The new perspective on religion and ideology fits in perfectly with the rich palette that makes up the new

⁸ For a statistical overview of religious trends in the Netherlands and the rise of spiritual seeking, see e.g. Gerard Dekker, Joep de Hart, and Jan Peters, *God in Nederland 1966-1996* (Amsterdam: Anthos, 1997); Jos Becker, and Joep de Hart, *Secularisatie en alternatieve zingeving in Nederland* (Rijswijk/Den Haag: Vuga, 1997); T. Bernts et al. (eds.), *God in Nederland 1996-2006* (Kampen: Ten Have, 2007); Joep de Hart, *Zwevende gelovigen: oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2013); Joep de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2014).

spirituality, something that until recently carried the epithet New Age.⁹ The ideas and practices of this movement have probably become so popular partly because of what they do *not* have, namely a lead or switch which restricts the movement of the individual.

There are three key variants (or aspects) of seeking: (1) seeking as a norm, as an inevitable given for those who are religious; (2) seeking as the combining of elements from divergent traditions; (3) seeking as a quest to discover ever deeper insights. As we shall see, these three types are found both within and outside the church. Who are these religious seekers? What are they seeking and is the Christian tradition and the church still relevant for them? And if so, where and how? These are the central questions addressed in this chapter. We devote only limited attention to a theoretical embedding and reflection (see other contributions in this collection for more on this). The emphasis is on a quantitative exploration of religious seeking, on providing some statistical material derived from a number of large-scale surveys.

Our empirical exploration is divided into three stages. In Section 2, we first operationalise the notion of religious seeking using available data. Using three population surveys, we distinguish between religious seekers, non-seekers and atheists. In Section 3 we present profiles of these three groups based on social background characteristics, church involvement and views on religious and ideological issues. Third, in Section 4 we compare seekers within the main churches in the Netherlands (Catholic and the main Protestant church) with non-seekers in these churches and with seekers not affiliated to these churches. This gives us an impression of the context in which churches are trying to be meaningful. Section 5 concludes with our reflections on the implications for the Church and churches.

SEEKERS IN TRIPLICATE

Our typology of Dutch seekers is based on the findings of large-scale surveys. We draw on three sources which highlight different aspects of seeking and allow us to study different relationships. We use the most recent editions of the ‘God in the Netherlands’ survey, from 2006 (GIN 2006),¹⁰ ‘Cultural Changes in the Netherlands’ from 2012/3 (CCN 2012)¹¹ and the 2009 module ‘Unaffiliated Spirituality and Social engagement’ (USS 2009). All data in this chapter relate to the population aged 18 years and older.

⁹ Joep de Hart, *Zwevende gelovigen: oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*.

¹⁰ See: Bernts et al., *God in Nederland 1996-2006*.

¹¹ See: <http://www.scp.nl>

These databases provide us with a picture of the above three variants of seeking. The first is seeking as a behavioural norm, where seekers see themselves as 'gatherers' who believe that religion is to be found by drawing from different traditions and ideas (section 2.1). In the second variant, seeking is a practice and seekers are people who regard this as their approach to religion (section 2.2). The final variant is seeking as a form of deepening faith or inner search; these seekers attach great importance to an unrelenting quest for 'deeper insights' (religious or non-religious) (section 2.3).

Seeking as Norm and Seekers as Gatherers (GIN 2006)

The 2006 God in the Netherlands survey contained two statements relating to seeking (see table below): 'I think religion is more about seeking than fixed convictions' and 'I think religion is something that has to be sought in the wisdom of different traditions and ideas'. Of those surveyed, 42% said the first statement applied to them completely and a further 30% reported that it applied partly to them. The respective figures for the second statement were 38% and 30%. In other words, a majority of the Dutch population have a view of religion in which seeking plays a part. More than half characterise their religion as at least partially the result of wide-ranging seeking. Here, we concentrate on the second variant of seeking, as a form of religious 'gathering'. Seekers are identified in table 1 as people who say that seeking applies completely to them and who also believe in God or a higher power: roughly 22% (16 + 6) of all Dutch persons aged 18 years and older, shown in the yellow highlighted part of table 1 (more about the grey shaded section later).

Seeking as Practice and Seekers as Self-active Combiners (CCN 2012)

The most recent module of the Cultural Changes in the Netherlands survey (CCN 2012/13) asked respondents to what extent they felt the statement, 'Religion is something I seek for myself in the wisdom of different traditions and ideas' applied for them. 16% of respondents felt it applied completely, 41% partially and 43% not at all. In table 2 we plot these responses against views on religion. Around 13% of all Dutch people aged 18 years and older who feel the statement applies completely to them and who as a minimum believe in a higher power identify themselves as religious seekers in the yellow highlighted block.

Table 1. Seekers in ‘God in the Netherlands’ (GIN): % of the entire Dutch 18+ population. (Source: GIN 2006 [n = 1123])

	All	‘I think religion is something that has to be sought in the wisdom of different traditions and ideas’		
		Does not apply at all	Applies partly	Applies completely
There is no God or higher power	14	6	2	5
I do not know if God or a higher power exists	26	8	7	11
There must be something like a higher power that governs life	36	8	13	16
There is a God that is personally concerned with each of us	24	11	7	6
All	100	33	29	38

Table 2. Seekers in ‘Cultural Changes in the Netherlands’ (CCN): % of the entire Dutch 18+ population. (Source: CCN 2012 [n = 2663])

	all	‘Religion is something I seek for myself in the wisdom of different traditions and ideas’		
		Does not apply at all	Applies partly	Applies completely
I do not believe in God	21	15	5	2
I do not know if God exists, and I do not believe that we have any way of knowing	14	7	6	1
I do not believe in a God that is personally concerned with each of us, but I do believe in a higher power	21	7	11	4
At some moments I do believe in God, at other moments I don't	8	3	4	1
I believe in God, although I have my doubts	12	3	7	2
I believe without any doubt that God exists	24	9	9	6
	10			
All	0	43	41	16

The CCN typology resembles that of GIN, but the questions differ in the two surveys, so that the two typologies cannot be simply equated. There is a crucial difference as regards seeking between the God in the Netherlands survey, which asks about a general (and therefore less binding) opinion on seeking as an element of religion, and Cultural Changes, in which respondents are asked about their actual seeking behaviour. It seems plausible that this is the reason that Cultural Changes produces fewer seekers than God in the Netherlands.

Seeking as Deepening One's Faith and Seekers as Inner Searchers (USS 2009)

The additional module 'Unaffiliated Spirituality and Social Engagement' (USS 2009) using the LISS-panel¹² was developed and organized in October 2009 by Joantine Berghuijs and colleagues.¹³ In this study we plot responses to the question, 'Which of the following statements best matches your idea of God?' against opinions on the statement, 'I feel that it is very important to continue to seek deeper insights'. This statement, like the GIN statement, is about the respondent's own seeking behaviour, but is not specifically about religious insights. This probably explains why we now identify a higher proportion of the population as seekers: around 26% who completely endorse the importance of continuing to seek and who at least believe in a higher power.

¹² LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) is a panel of a representative sample of Dutch individuals who participate in monthly Internet surveys administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The data from USS 2009 are supplemented with data from the same panel gathered using other questionnaires: updates of personal data in the same month and surveys about 'religion and ethnicity' from early 2010 and (if 2010 is not available) 2009.

¹³ Joantine Berghuijs, Jos Pieper, and Cok Bakker, "Being 'spiritual' and being 'religious' in Europe: Diverging life orientations," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28 (2013), pp. 15-32; Joantine Berghuijs, Jos Pieper, and Cok Bakker, "Conceptions of spirituality among the Dutch population," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 35 (2013), pp. 369-398; Joantine Berghuijs, Jos Pieper and Cok Bakker, "New spirituality and social engagement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52 (2013), pp. 775-792.

Table 3. Seekers in ‘Unaffiliated Spirituality and Social Engagement’ (USS 2009): % of the entire Dutch 18+ population. (Source: USS 2009 (n = 2447))

	all	‘I feel that it is very important to continue to seek deeper insights’		
		Disagree (entirely)	Neither agree nor disagree /don’t know	Agree (entirely)
I do not believe in God	22	9	8	5
I do not know if God exists, and I do not believe that we have any way of knowing	15	5	7	3
I do not believe in a God that is personally concerned with each of us, but I do believe in a higher power	19	4	7	8
At some moments I do believe in God, at other moments I don't	9	2	5	3
I believe in God, although I have my doubts	14	3	6	5
I believe without any doubt that God exists	21	3	7	10
	10			
All	0	27	41	33

Religious Seekers and Non-seekers

In the three tables above, the seekers are highlighted in yellow, but the tables also each contain a grey block: these are the religious non-seekers, people who believe in a higher power, but who reject statements about seeking. We leave out of consideration people who have no opinion about seeking or who definitely do not believe in God, or who are (indifferently) agnostic. The religious seekers and non-seekers in our three surveys are compared with each other in table 4.

As we have seen, the shares of seekers and non-seekers diverge considerably depending on the ‘seek’ indicator used. The most seekers and fewest non-seekers in relative terms are found in USS 2009, focusing on the desirability of continuing to seek for deeper insights. The relatively highest share of non-seekers and lowest share of seekers are found in CCN, where seekers are explicitly regarded as drawing from different religions themselves.

Table 4. Non-seekers and seekers as % of various population categories.
(Source: GIN 2006, CCN 2012 and USS 2009)

	Seekers gatherers (GIN 2006)	as (GIN 2006)	Seekers active (CCN 2012)	as self- combiners (CCN 2012)	Seekers searchers (USS 2009)	as inner (USS 2009)
	Non- seekers	Seekers	Non- seekers	seekers	Non- seekers	Seekers
All	18	22	22	13	12	25
Male	16	19	21	11	11	22
female	21	24	23	15	12	28
18-39	19	17	18	11	15	17
40-59	17	22	22	13	11	25
60+	19	28	25	15	11	33
Educational level low	22	21	28	14	11	23
Middle	18	23	21	12	15	23
High	13	20	17	13	11	30
No religious affiliation	10	19	18	9	9	16
Roman Catholic	16	32	15	23	17	34
Protestant Church of the NL	36	21	34	18	19	42
Other Christian affiliation	60	19	.	.	11	48
Other affiliation	56	26	44	26	8	27

As regards background characteristics, women and older people are overrepresented in both categories together (they are more often religious) and are relatively more strongly represented among the seekers. They are principally overrepresented among the seekers in USS 2009, where the assumption is not that they draw from different religions. People with a higher education level are also overrepresented in this category. The biggest differences are found for religious affiliation. Those with no affiliation are underrepresented among non-seekers and seekers, though not very strongly. People with a different (Christian) affiliation are less inclined to be seekers if this means referring to other religions. Among those who continue to seek (within their own religion), the other Christian affiliations score highest, immediately followed by mainstream Protestants. For Catholics, referral to other religions is less of an issue: they are more often seekers according to the GIN and CCN criteria than Protestants.

RELIGIOUS PROFILES OF SEEKERS AND NON-SEEKERS

Seekers as Gatherers (GIN 2006)

As table 5 shows, non-seekers have had a religious upbringing just as often as seekers. Seekers do differ from non-seekers in that they are less often regular churchgoers at this juncture in their lives. Their view of religion is much more individualised. They more often believe that religion and church affiliation are not the same and that religion need not necessarily be a group activity; they also more often position themselves between the two extremes of pronounced faith and pronounced lack of faith. They emphasise much more strongly than non-seekers the dynamic and eclectic nature of their ideology, see the inner experience as a touchstone for truth and paint religion as a temporary, not to say ephemeral, equilibrium that may be different in a different phase of their lives.

Table 5. Religious views, religious practices and views on religion (% of all, non-seekers and seekers). (Source: GIN 2006)

	All	Non-seekers	Seekers
Was brought up in a certain faith	74	86	84
Attends church regularly	16	42	20
I think religion is more about seeking than fixed convictions	42	35	51
I think you have to experience truth internally	66	62	83
I have no difficulty with questioning my views about the meaning of life	60	53	69
I see religion more as something personal, not so much as a group activity	57	46	70
I think religion as such doesn't have that much to do with church affiliation	52	37	64
I think religion can come from many sources	48	37	70
I don't really class myself as non-religious, but also not as a convinced religious person	46	30	49
I think religion is something that changes continually during your life	35	29	52
My life experience has caused me to change my views about the meaning of life	37	36	50

Seekers as Self-active Combiners (CCN 2012)

Seeking as the active combining of religious elements from diverse traditions and movements is not associated with greater distance from the

Bible tradition, but places rather more emphasis on the optimistic aspects of faith (indicated here as a belief in Heaven and in life after death). Seekers describe themselves more often than non-seekers as religious, much more often as spiritual. The two groups do not differ in their trust in the church or religious organisations, but in this variant of seeking, too, it seems that seekers are more strongly led by more individual ideas about the meaning of life. They again show more support for typical elements of self-spirituality, such as being guided by self-development, personal experience and intuition.

Table 6. Support for various opinions (% of all, non-seekers and seekers). (Source: CCN 2012)

	All	Non-seekers	Seekers
Completely agrees with 'Bible is the word of God'	29	45	43
Ditto life after death	41	53	67
Ditto 'there is a Heaven'	34	49	57
Ditto 'there is a Hell'	18	32	29
I am definitely a religious person	20	33	41
I am definitely a spiritual person	12	14	32
Has a (very) great deal of trust in church and religious organisations	13	21	23
<u>(strongly) Agrees with:</u>			
'You have to look for the meaning of life in your unique inner experience and the development of your own abilities'	87	79	92
'When making decisions, it's usually better to rely on your intuition and feeling than on your intellect'	59	53	71
'Life only acquires meaning if you dedicate yourself to an ideal or task'	30	30	40

Seekers as Inner Searchers (USS 2009)

Seekers, interpreted as inner searchers, have a less individualised profile than the two previous variants of religious seeking. They have a much less absolute notion of truth. For them, a personal crisis has much more often served as a source of new insight. Table 7 and other data not reported here show that they also more often believe in life after death and that praying is worthwhile. More of them describe themselves as both religious and spiritual. This group is relatively strongly committed to religion and the church in several respects, and their belief in traditional church notions such as the meaning of the Bible or the usefulness of praying is just as strong as that of the non-seekers. They do however more often question

certain elements of church dogma, such as the image of Jesus as portrayed in churches (or, for example, the Koran as the word of God). Some of them also experience a crisis as a source of deeper insight, and they also value religious doubts and uncertainty. The same applies for their experimental attitude to religion, guided by personal experience, without this meaning that they place themselves outside every group context.

Table 7. Religious practices and support for various opinions (% of all, non-seekers and seekers). (Source: USS 2009)

	All	Non-seekers	Seekers
I consider myself part of a religious, spiritual or life-philosophy group	32	40	61
Attends religious gatherings at least monthly	18	21	35
Prays at least monthly (aside from religious services)	33	38	60
When aged 15, parents were members of religion or church community	66	78	81
When aged 15, parents attended religious gatherings at least monthly	51	63	69
'I am never entirely sure about the truth that I believe in'	31	25	42
'The experience of a personal crisis contributes significantly to my obtaining deeper insights and ideas'	52	37	83
'Doubts and uncertainties are often very valuable to me' ¹⁴	42	20	77
'It is good to experiment with the wisdom and practices handed down by different traditions, to see what works best for you'	30	13	48
'There are many paths of wisdom, but they all radiate from the same eternal source'	27	17	53
Churches present a wrong image of Jesus	19	14	23

Summarising, we can say that religious or spiritual seeking does not stand alone, but forms part of a view of religion which includes other elements:

¹⁴ The three statements so far, together with 'Every acquired insight is provisional', 'In my experience, questions play a more significant role than answers', and 'I feel that it is very important to continue to seek deeper insights', the item used to distinguish seekers, together form a Likert scale ($\alpha = .78$), labelled as 'Quest' by Berghuijs. We have not used this scale because it combines doubtfulness and inner search. Catholics and Protestants do not differ on the scale, but they do deviate on the items. Protestants agree more with 'I feel that it is very important to continue to seek deeper insights' (46% of PCN-protestants agree against 37% of Catholics), which is compensated by more agreement with the lack-of-security statements 'I am never entirely sure about the truth that I

eclecticism, inner experience, openness, individualism, dynamic. It is not about the eccentric ideas of an enlightened vanguard. Our data show that large numbers of Dutch people think about religion along these lines, but that this applies much more for the seekers than for non-seekers. Seekers are characterised by a less intensive church affiliation and on some points also less affinity with traditional Christian teachings. They hold a view of religion in which alternative spiritual notions also play a role, believe that truth is something that has to be experienced internally, that religion is above all something personal, that can if necessary be experienced outside any church context, that religion can come from many sources and that it can change during your life. This broader orientation of seekers is also apparent from their responses to a question on whether and how often they read magazines focusing on alternative spirituality or New Age interests.¹⁵ Around 8% of the entire sample read at least three such publications occasionally; the figure among non-seekers is 4%, among seekers 18%.

SEEKERS AND NON-SEEKERS IN THE MAIN CHURCHES

In this third empirical section we compare seekers within the main churches of the Netherlands with seekers outside those churches and with non-seekers within them. These non-seekers correspond with Wuthnow's 'dwellers', to which we referred in the Introduction. The main churches in the Netherlands are the Roman Catholic (RC) and Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN). These two churches together account for an estimated 85% of all registered Christian believers in the Netherlands (and more than a third of the population). Unfortunately, our surveys do not permit a further breakdown into Catholic or Protestant.

As will become apparent, seekers with a church affiliation are in many respects an intermediate group who sometimes resemble seekers outside the church and sometimes non-seekers within the church. What are the profiles of the two types of seekers which are our focus here? To what extent does the church still figure within their experiential horizon?

The God in the Netherlands (GIN) survey provides information on this. This survey contains questions on former church membership and also makes it possible to distinguish between different church profiles. In addition to the information about present church affiliation, we use information about the former affiliation or affiliation of the parents when the respondent was aged 15.

believe in' (39% of Catholics and 34% of Protestants agree) and 'Every acquired insight is provisional' (49% of Catholics and 42% of Protestants agree).

¹⁵ Joep de Hart, "Postmoderne spiritualiteit," *God in Nederland 1996-2006*, pp. 163 ff.

Non-affiliated seekers have extremely low trust in the church (as an institution), though a sizeable minority have by no means abandoned the church altogether (36% still attend church regularly). This is also found to apply for the Christian faith, though it is mainly the more optimistic aspects which fall on fertile ground here: a high proportion are receptive to the idea of life after death and the existence of Heaven, but not the existence of Hell. These seekers more often describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ than as ‘religious’, and are almost unanimously focused on self-spirituality. The best chance of reaching this group would seem to be to focus on the optimistic aspects of religion and an interpretation of religion in which the doctrinaire aspects are emphasised less than the notion of religion as offering potential for personal growth.

Table 8. Various opinions among seekers inside the main churches, seekers outside and non-seekers inside (%). (Source: CCN 2012)

	Non-affiliated seekers	RC+PCN seekers	RC+PCN non-seekers
Attends church \geq monthly	36	80	82
Has a (very) great deal of trust in church and religious organisations	6	36	38
<u>(strongly) Agrees with:</u>			
‘You have to look for the meaning of life in, your unique inner experience and the development of your own abilities’	95	92	74
‘When making decisions, it’s usually better to rely on your intuition and feeling than on your intellect’	76	73	48
‘Life only acquires meaning if you dedicate yourself to an ideal or task’	36	42	34

As stated, the God in the Netherlands survey provides additional information. To start with, the data from this survey give a clear impression of seekers’ attitudes to the church. We use three indicators for those attitudes here: do people think churches in the Netherlands have enough to offer to people with spiritual questions and needs; do people want a celebration or ritual in the church to mark important events in their lives; and would they turn to a member of the clergy (pastor, priest, vicar) if they were wrestling with a moral dilemma that they could not talk about at home? As expected, non-affiliated seekers show the greatest distance from the church on all three indicators. Seekers within the church differ from non-seekers because they are less automatically disposed to church-based rituals. The same applies to a much greater degree for pastoral

support from a member of the clergy (in the event of a moral dilemma). The church will have its work cut out to overcome the scepticism of these non-affiliated seekers and fulfil its envisaged role as a source of spiritual inspiration. Churches would do well to allow people more of a say in the content of church rituals; they have little inclination to outsource these events entirely to the church. This is a difficult group for churches to reach; even when faced with a severe moral dilemma, this group rarely seek help from the church (preferring to turn to networks of friends, for example).

Table 9. Various opinions about churches among seekers inside the main churches, seekers outside and non-seekers inside (%). (Source: GIN 2006)

	Non-affiliated seekers	RC/PCN seekers	RC/PCN non-seekers
Thinks that churches in the Netherlands offer enough/a great deal to people with spiritual questions and needs	27	62	58
Preferences regarding celebrations and rituals to mark important events in own life:			
▪ yes, in the church	9	68	77
▪ in the church, but in their own way	24	21	17
▪ a ritual, but not in the church	37	7	2
▪ no ritual	29	3	5
Would not turn to a clergyman in the event of a serious moral dilemma	6	22	44

We have already seen that, compared with non-seekers, seekers take a broader view of religion that does not draw only on traditional Christian teachings. It now emerges that this applies more for seekers within the church than for church-affiliated non-seekers, but that non-affiliated seekers have the greatest affinity with this broader view. The main difference compared with affiliated seekers relates to religion as a collective experience: religion as something for which a group or church is not needed, where people do not wish to be part of a religious or other group. When it comes to the internal experience of truth, openness to new insights and a willingness to change or to be inspired by diverse sources of religion, there is virtually no difference between affiliated and non-affiliated seekers; the latter occupy an intermediate position in this regard. Reading New Age magazines is also mainly typical of non-affiliated seekers.

The task for churches is to awaken interest in this group, something that can by no means be taken for granted. A 'package' model of religion (in which it is not possible to embrace teachings selectively, but where

everything, the whole package, has to be endorsed and embraced) which demands lifelong loyalty (from cradle to grave) or absolute agreements (the church as the only source of truth) has little chance of success. A personal approach, with respect for people's personal experience and for their own interpretations of religious truths, a sort of modular approach that is geared to the phase of life and lifestyle of non-affiliated seekers, would appear more promising.

Table 10. Various opinions about religion among seekers inside the main churches, seekers outside and non-seekers inside (% 'Yes, applies completely to me'). (Source: GIN 2006)

	Non-affiliated seekers	RC/PCN seekers	RC/PCN non-seekers
I think religion is more about seeking than fixed convictions	58	45	32
I think you have to experience truth internally	85	81	58
I have no difficulty with questioning my views about the meaning of life	70	68	54
I see religion more as something personal, not so much as a group activity	74	64	39
I think religion as such doesn't have that much to do with church affiliation	82	47	28
I think religion can come from many sources	70	68	32
I don't really class myself as non-religious, but also not as a convinced religious person	63	36	22
I think religion is something that changes continually during your life	53	50	29
My life experience has caused me to change my views about the meaning of life	53	43	27
Reads New Age magazines (de Hart 2007: 192)	24	9	4

The freer orientation of seekers compared with non-seekers can also be illustrated through people's ideas about life after death (not reported here). All three groups overwhelmingly believe in the concept, but the content of that belief varies. Non-seekers are found to have more traditional Christian ideas about it than seekers, among whom reincarnation and a later return to Earth are more popular. This again applies most strongly for non-affiliated seekers, who also – like affiliated seekers – have little truck with notions of Hell and resurrection.

There is a clear dividing line on some of the moral and societal functions assigned to the church between non-affiliated seekers and the two affiliated groups (seekers and non-seekers). Non-affiliated seekers

think much less often than the two affiliated groups that church and faith temper egotism, maintain morality, prevent society from going into decay, encourage volunteering, and are an important source of sense-making. Non-affiliated seekers are not likely to be highly receptive to appeals to the moral importance of the church (which is not great in their eyes; there is considerable wariness about the moral pretensions of churches in this group).

Table 12. Various opinions about churches among seekers inside the main churches, seekers outside and non-seekers inside (%). (Source: GIN 2006 [18+])

	Non-affiliated seekers	RC/PCN seekers	RC/PCN non-seekers
Thinks that churches are a very reliable source of information	2	19	18
<i>Agrees completely with:</i>			
• It would be a good thing if churches were to disappear	4	1	0
• If churches disappeared, egotism would be given full rein	5	20	25
• If no one believes in God any more, morality will be in danger	5	35	39
• Belief in God ensures that society doesn't fall into decay	6	31	28
<i>Agrees that without churches...</i>			
• Fewer people would volunteer on behalf of others	43	72	63
• There would be fewer people with old-fashioned views	53	52	23
• Lots of people would no longer know what the meaning of life is	51	69	76
• People would really set about changing society instead of waiting for a better life in the hereafter	37	32	18

The God in the Netherlands survey provides data on involvement with the church and perception of the church only for church-affiliated seekers and non-seekers (see following table). Once again, it is unfortunately not possible to break the figures down into Roman Catholic and Protestant believers because of the small numbers involved. Church-affiliated non-seekers show stronger ties to the church in several respects: they are rather more often active as volunteers within their local faith community, feel more closely associated with that community, attach more importance to the sense of community with others in their church, and are more

enthusiastic about the church services they attend. The stronger individualism and greater openness of the affiliated seekers that emerged in the foregoing discussion of their view of religion also manifests itself here, though the differences are not great: seekers have slightly looser ties with their church, more often think that the church as a whole is important, not just their local faith community, and also attach greater value to the efforts of the church to achieve a better world.

Table 13. Involvement with churches by seekers and non-seekers in main churches (%). (Source: GIN 2006)

	RC/PC N seekers	RC/PCN non- seekers
Is active as a volunteer in own Catholic congregation, Protestant community or religious group	20	29
Assesses services in own church as good or very good	57	72
Strength of ties with own church or religious group	.	
▪ very close	26	38
▪ fairly close	33	33
▪ fairly loose	34	22
▪ no ties at all	8	7
What is most important		
▪ the church as a whole	26	24
▪ the local faith/religious community	23	33
▪ both equally	52	43
Are the following important reasons for you to be involved with a church? ('very important')	.	
▪ the church as a place where I can experience my faith	36	43
▪ experiencing the sense of community with others in church	28	33
▪ the support I receive from the church, especially in difficult situations	29	21
▪ the efforts made by the church for a better world, and I want to be part of that	31	20
Does your church listen to its members enough?		
▪ my church definitely listens to the views of the members	47	51
▪ members do have a voice, but are usually not involved in decisions	42	43
▪ members in reality have no influence at all in what is said and done	11	7

DISCUSSION

The position of Dutch churches has greatly weakened across a broad front in recent decades. Church statistics show a steady contraction in terms of membership, attendance, participation in church rituals, number of church

buildings and church communities, recruitment of church officers and professionals.¹⁶ The profile of the church members who remain is moreover not that of the main carriers of the modernisation process: they are on average older and lower-educated. For large parts of the Dutch population, churches appear to function as a sort of public utility: not something to serve as a constant guide, but something to make use of when needed, for example at moments of biographical transition, national events or collective mourning. In 1958, more than three-quarters of the Dutch population counted themselves as belonging to a church community; in 1980 this figure had shrunk to half, and in 2012 to just 30%. Midway through the 1980s, 17% of the population attended church once a week; the figure today is 10%. The younger people are, the less likely they are to have had a religious upbringing, the less often they are a member of and attend a church, and the less inclined they are to pray and read the Bible.

The research data point to a substantially greater erosion of the ties with a church than of the belief in God or a higher power or of a person's definition of themselves as a believer or religious person. Religion and spirituality no longer allow themselves to be confined within church walls. The rise of a spiritual milieu which only partially overlaps with the church and the traditional Christian devotion appears to point to a deinstitutionalisation of religion. Self-spirituality – the belief that the meaning of life lies in the discovery of one's true, authentic self – is an important source of inspiration here. The quest for spirituality is another core element of the view of religion held by the modern Dutch, within and outside the church. 'Seekers' are characterised by a concentration on their own inner experience as a source of truth, and by an openness to different religious movements and traditions, from which they draw in an eclectic way.

In our analysis of Dutch seekers we used three databases, each with its own operationalisation of seeking. The 2006 God in the Netherlands survey presents an eclectic picture of religion, in which 22% of respondents can be described as seekers. In Cultural Changes in the Netherlands (CCN 2012) the data describe people who report that they actually practise religious eclecticism – a stricter criterion – and this produces 13% seekers. Finally, in the Unaffiliated Spirituality and Social engagement module (USS) we looked at those who believe it is important to continue seeking a deeper truth, not necessarily involving religion; 25% then emerge as seekers. The profile of the first two variants of seekers show correspondences: they are more often older, female and Roman Catholic. The third type is different: here we find more members of the

¹⁶ E.g., Joep de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland*.

Protestant Church in the Netherlands (far and away the largest of the Dutch Protestant churches) than Catholics, and fewer older persons and women. Well-educated women aged over 59 are overrepresented.

The first category of seekers holds less traditional views on religion. Their view of religion incorporates all kinds of new spiritual elements: individualism, personal experience, religion as a project of change, a leaning towards New Age ideas. This pattern continues with the second type of seekers, who relatively often see themselves as religious but also as spiritual and who are greatly enamoured of the idea of self-spirituality (sense-making based on one's own unique inner experience) and personal intuition as a source of knowledge. The third, more general type of seekers often derive deeper insights from personal crisis. They often endorse traditional church teachings, embrace the church and practise religion, but at the same time play down their own claims to truth.

The starting point of this chapter was the observation that a clearly defined religion, fuelled by the Christian tradition and practised within the arms of the church in a virtually unquestioned way from cradle to grave is making way for a perception of religion as a dynamic process, a journey of discovery which can take a whole lifetime, in which people's own experience and biography are the most important source of inspiration and which is more likely to be expressed through individual interest or temporary ties in informal groups than through membership of a church community. Religion as an art of life, as self-discovery, as a quest, in which intriguing questions are more important than set answers. For the United States, Wuthnow speaks of a shift from a 'spirituality of dwelling' to a 'spirituality of seeking' – a development which can also be observed in the Netherlands.¹⁷

The new spirituality bears the clear hallmarks of developments that have been summarised as individualization and subjectivisation. Charles Taylor refers to a 'massive subjective turn', Hartman observes 'a massive subjective shift towards spirituality since the 1960s'.¹⁸ According to the Dutch historian Van Rooden, the cultural revolution in the 1960s provides the key to understanding what has happened, and he stresses the contrast with the Christian Netherlands before that time: "The logic of the new practices that made possible and imposed the emergence of the expressive and reflexive self marked a stark contrast with the nature of Dutch Christianity as it existed before 1960. That Christianity was based not on a reflexive and expressive self, but rather on collective and unquestioned

¹⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *After heaven: spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Laura M. Hartman, *The Christian consumer: living faithfully in a fragile world* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

rituals.”¹⁹ In the changing spiritual climate, truth is not validated through institutions, conformity to the templates of a tradition or the Bible as the word of God, but by seeking contact with the deeper layers in oneself, through what is experienced as authentic, the questions with which one is filled at a particular point in life, informal contacts with others who share this interest.²⁰

In periods of great societal stability, people make religion their home. The foundations of that home are the shared traditions, customs and collective routines pursued through periodic gatherings and vital communities. In such a milieu, religion is in large part a matter of remembering your upbringing and above all looking carefully at how earlier generations did things: as the old cock crows, the young cock learns. This is no longer the world of most modern Dutch people; their path through life is less predefined and less preordained. They more often have a desire to mark out their own route through life rather than simply following in the footsteps of their forebears. There is today a looser relationship with traditions and with civil-society organisations, including the church. People are more inclined to shop around today, and there is no guarantee that they will choose the established traditions. Many people wish to keep as many options open as possible for as long as possible and to feel that they count as individuals. It is not the canons of tradition, authoritative arguments or group customs that hold sway today, but whether the individual is personally affected. Paradoxically enough, this assumes a continual process of judgement and self-reflection.

According to the 2006 God in the Netherlands survey, four out of ten Dutch people are explicitly seekers in terms of religion, while this applies partially for seven out of ten. In the 2012 Cultural Changes in the Netherlands survey, more than half the population agreed at least partly that they regard religion as a matter of drawing from a range of traditions and ideas. Religion is increasingly defined and practised outside church institutions; there are more and more floating believers. And those floating believers are fickle, assertive, often critical consumers. It is not uncommon for a person's phase of life to determine what they consider relevant in their own lives.

Until the 1960s, the major churches reacted in accordance with a sort of theological law of inertia to the changes taking place in the Dutch

¹⁹ Peter Van Rooden, “Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlandse Christendom.” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden (BMGN)*, 119, nr. 4 (2004), 524-551; cf. Idem, *Religieuze regimes: over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland, 1570-1990* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996).

²⁰ Cf. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity.”

religious landscape. Under pressure from societal change, they subsequently began making all manner of adjustments and experiments in their liturgy, staffing and the message they conveyed. They tried in several ways to bend a traditional monoculture in the direction of what in its most progressive variants sometimes virtually resembles a religious multiple choice. With varying success, this was their attempt to key into the spirit of the times.

Given the breadth and depth of the changes, it was to be expected that the new cloak donned by priests and vicars would not be enough to turn the tide and make what the church had to offer attractive for a new generation of consumers. Because the crisis not only relates to the way in which faith is presented; it goes beyond church life alone. The process of secularisation reflects developments that are happening on a wider scale within Dutch society. People have taken on a looser relationship with organisations in all kinds of domains. Increasingly, they have begun outsourcing their involvement to professionals who they then expect to represent them effectively and responsibly. The competition has increased everywhere; people are less willing to commit for a lengthy period; they are guided by their personal interest and current agenda, and make a sort of periodic cost-benefit analysis of their membership. And they do this not only in the field of religion, and also in other areas, where the role of organisations as meeting places is diminishing, where they are being assigned more of a facilitating role and seeing a decline in the proportion of members who are willing to work actively on behalf of the organisation. This is true not only of churches, but also of political parties and trade unions, for example.

Churches are in decline, but people who reject any possibility of the existence of a God, a higher power or a supernatural reality are still in the minority in the Dutch population. A majority are situated between the two extremes of faithful church attendance and devoted Christian faith on the one hand and an individually experienced, complete unbelief on the other. They may no longer believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they also do not really believe in the God of the philosophers. Rather, people are still involved in all manner of religious affairs, but by no means always as part of a group experience, for example through church membership. They often prefer to seek their own path, alone or with people who are important at that point in their lives (part of the individualization of religion). Many modern Dutch citizens behave as a kind of spiritual nomads, travelling between temporary stations and drawing on diverse sources. As they grow older, they increasingly question what they once accepted unquestioningly, or else they are no longer so exercised by it – and vice versa. They also limit themselves to one religious tradition (such as the catholic or Calvinist tradition) much less than in the past.

The three variants of seeking – seeking as an inherent element of (modern) religion, as a focus on different traditions, as a spiritual deepening – are found not just outside but also within the church. Seekers are a mixed company and their seeking can be expressed in a diversity of ways.²¹ There are seekers who move from one form of spirituality to another, without roots in any religious tradition and often at a great remove from the established churches. But seeking need not be a move towards a substitution of what the church has to offer by an embracing of non-Christian or non-church ideas and practices. Seeking may also enable people to rediscover their old faith, to grow in their faith, to supplement the existing church offer with sources of inspiration from elsewhere, without closing the church doors behind them. In Wuthnow's terms: a spirituality of dwelling can be combined with a spirituality of seeking.²² Our data suggest that the seeking by church-affiliated seekers is not based on a distancing from the church or from the Christian tradition; they are barely distinguishable from affiliated non-seekers in terms of their loyalty to the church and their faith.²³ As a group they do not appear to be in an intermediate phase between being on the margins of the church or being outside the church, though there is probably substantial potential for dynamic and a desire for change within the church, for a more liberal Christianity and an orientation towards movements that fall outside the church tradition and community. Apart from their ties with the church, this group's vision of religion and spirituality shows many

²¹ They may for example be young people who grew up in an orthodox Christian Reformed milieu and who join an evangelical community because they are looking for a more modern way to practise their religion that is closer to the individual experience, and in which the other senses are stimulated as well as the hearing. They may also be Christians who have come to see the church as too oppressive and anonymous and return to a community of liberal Protestants. They may be Catholics who take part in a discussion group or course dedicated to other world religions, and who as part of this activity take part in weekend Zen meditation sessions in an isolated abbey. They may be members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands who start a website dedicated to the mystical traditions. Or they may be believers who work to support asylum-seekers because they feel that official agencies, including from the church, do too little for these groups.

²² See also: Joep de Hart, *Zwevende gelovigen: oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*; Idem, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband: godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland*; Robert Wuthnow, *The struggle for America's soul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Williams B. Eerdmans 1989).; Wade C. Roof, *A generation of seekers: the spiritual journeys of the baby boom generation*; Idem, *Spiritual marketplace: baby boomers and the remaking of American religion*; Idem, "Spiritual seeking in the United States: report of a panel study," p. 109.

²³ Which does not rule out a growing polarisation between those who remain faithful to the old traditions and the affiliated seekers.

correspondences with non-affiliated seekers. It will not be easy for churches to reach this latter group. In many respects they are far removed from the church, and make at best selective use of the Christian faith. They tend to favour New Age ideas and practices over the Christian tradition; there is a good deal of ideological individualization, of religious organisational aversion.

Religious seeking is a phenomenon that is clearly present in the Dutch population and that currently appears to have the wind in its sails. Yet some perspective is called for at the conclusion to this discussion. The focus on seeking is by no means universally spread throughout the population. Not only a large part of humanity, but also those who are interested in religious questions today appear to fall into two categories: sparrows and swallows – home-lovers who see their home as their castle and travellers who sooner or later feel an itch in their blood and are keen to leave to seek out a new horizon. But few seem to wish to be in a permanent state of wandering, not even those who might be described as ‘flexi-believers’, ‘religious tinkerers’ or ‘spiritual nomads’. Throughout the centuries, migrations have reflected a linking of happiness to a place where people can feel at home: from Moses’ trek to Canaan to the movements of modern refugees to Western countries. According to Psalm 84, the sparrow finds a home, but even the swallow one day builds a nest.

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CHAPTER III

SEEKERS AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL CENTERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

KEES de GROOT and JOS PIEPER¹

INTRODUCTION

La Verna, a Franciscan center for spiritual development based in Amsterdam, advertises with the following mission statement: “La Verna is a project of the Franciscans in the Netherlands. La Verna welcomes everyone, regardless of denomination or religion. This is a spot where you can discover your spirituality and develop it further. The center is named after a mountain in Toscana, where Francis of Assisi liked to retreat for meditation.”

Although the origin of the center is Christian, its presentation is geared to contemporary spirituality. It downplays its ecclesial affiliation and uses the rhetoric of personal growth. Buddhist mandalas welcome its website visitors; courses in Enneagram and Life Coaching are on offer, next to a workshop on “Chakra Meditation and St. Francis’ Cantic of the Sun.”² La Verna exemplifies those centers with a Christian background that are trying to appeal to seekers.

This branding strategy is perfectly understandable from a marketing perspective, regardless of the theological motives behind it. For decades now, participation in parish life and identification with the Christian faith have been declining in Western society. At the same time, other religious practices and philosophies of life have appeared on the scene. Spiritual centers have been established, offering workshops,

¹ The authors would like to express their acknowledgements to the other members of the research team – Anke Bisschops, Willem Putman, and Suzette van IJssel – for their part in the research design, data collection, and analysis. Parts of this chapter appeared earlier in Kees de Groot, Jos Pieper, and Willem Putman, “New Spirituality in Old Monasteries?,” *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* 4 (2014). Grants for this research have been provided by the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, the Dutch Religious Conference (Commission Projects in the Netherlands), Stichting Nicolette Bruining Fonds, and the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscan) in the Netherlands. The results of the complete survey have been published in Dutch (Kees de Groot, Jos Pieper, and Willem Putman (eds.), *Zelf Zorgen Voor Je Ziel. Over De Actualiteit Van Christelijke Spirituele Centra* (Almere: Parthenon, 2013).

² www.laverna.nl [accessed 5-11-2012 and 29-4-2014].

events, and courses focusing on Eastern religious traditions, psychology, and the body. Present-day spiritual authors, trends, and movements exert a notable attraction. People both outside and inside the Church have responded to this appeal. To some extent, this new movement even originates in religious orders, unorthodox Christian movements, and the readership of mystics.

Our question is: How do Christian spiritual centers, especially Roman Catholic ones, handle the phenomenon of ‘new spirituality’ on the one hand, and the Christian tradition on the other? In pursuing an answer to this question, we included only centers that explicitly express this double affiliation. We did not study New Age or Buddhist centers, nor did we take into account those centers, either Roman Catholic or Protestant, that do not focus on spiritual seekers.

A preliminary remark should be made, though. A commitment to the future of the Catholic Church might mislead us in understanding how fundamental the present transformations are. The question about ‘the appeal of a Catholic minority church in a world of seekers’ focusses on two marginal phenomena in Dutch society: the waning Roman Catholic Church and – taking the word ‘seekers’ in a strict sense – the active, individualistic interest in spirituality of some *virtuosi*. It asks under which conditions this church can be attractive to them. It is important to realize that the national context of the Netherlands is one of a dominating indifference to participation in any religious organization, and mistrust of any religious system whatsoever.³ The term “non-active seekers” may obscure this. People are, at times, and some more than others, interested in reading about religion, spirituality, and philosophy. They have experiences of guidance, grace, and abandonment. They ritualize life events. They have moral principles. This is all part of their lives. But the idea that one should be part of a religious community is only present among a shrinking minority of the population.

In the Netherlands, the involvement with the Catholic Church, or with any church, was particularly high in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the interest in any church-based religion has dwindled. However, people keep asking for rituals and continue to believe in miracles and in an afterlife; some even believe in a pre-life before birth. During the period 1966-2006, the support for the belief that ‘there is a God who is concerned with each person individually’ decreased significantly and was held by only a quarter of the population. Faith in ‘some higher power’ gained support, as did doubt about and denial of the existence of God or a higher

³ Joep de Hart, *Geloven Binnen en Buiten Verband. Godsdienstige Ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2014).

power. Yet, atheists are still a small minority.⁴ Likewise, followers of the Christian faith are also a minority, though a larger one.⁵ The Christian faith co-exists with other types of faith, and with the abstinence of faith and uncertainty.

In the next sections, we will (2) introduce the central theoretical issues on Christian religion and spirituality that informed our study; (3) explore the content these centers supply; (4) report on the methods used in the subsequent survey; and (5) present those results that are relevant with respect to the Church reaching out to seekers. In the last section (6), we will answer our initial questions and indicate ways to deal with ‘the world of seekers’ in pastoral care.

SPIRITUALITY AND CHRISTIAN RELIGION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A Cultural Phenomenon, not a Confession

The parallel trends of decreasing church-based religion, on the one hand, and a continuing interest in religion and spirituality, on the other, have been characterized as paradoxical.⁶ Yet, only when religion is supposed to be church-based would this coincidence appear as a contradiction in the first place. If religion is seen as a cultural phenomenon, there is no reason for surprise that the phenomenon endures after the decay of the main Christian churches.⁷ With or without churches, people tend to have faith and question their faith, especially in the face of sudden changes such as death. Screenwriters and game designers use religious and Biblical themes – even without ecclesial directions. In every society, people develop rituals in order to reach salvation or to protect themselves from evil. A person may devote her life to her family, her career, sports, or the preservation of the climate – with or without referring to the concept of God.⁸ Religion does not coincide with the identification with religious

⁴ Ton Bernts, Gerard Dekker, and Joep de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996-2006* (Kampen: Ten Have/RKK, 2007), p. 40.

⁵ Loek Halman, Inge Sieben, and Marga van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values. Trends and Traditions at the Turn of the Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 58.

⁶ Erik Sengers (ed.), *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), p. 15.

⁷ Meerten B. ter Borg and Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Powers. Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

⁸ Gabriël J.M. van den Brink, “Nederland in Vergelijkend Perspectief,” *De Lage Landen En Het Hogere. De Betekenis Van Geestelijke Beginselen in Het Moderne Bestaan* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 114.

organizations and is certainly not restricted to those religious organizations that have been dominant in the past.

The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have been the heyday of the concept of religious confession or denomination. Religion was not primarily a matter of believing or of practicing, but of belonging. One *was* a Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, whether orthodox, heterodox, or non-believing, whether practicing or not. Nowadays, religion is more individualized. Choice prevails in matters of faith. Still, both scholars and journalists tend to use the former frame of reference in order to localize present-day spirituality.

As a result, a new quasi-denomination has been constructed, consisting of people who are called “Unaffiliated Spirituals.” In the Netherlands, a research company for marketing and management (*Motivaction*) introduced this label for those who affirm that they have a (somewhat) spiritual *or* religious attitude, but who do not identify themselves as belonging to a larger religion. Respondents in this category (26% of the Dutch population, according to their estimation) showed a higher score on items about spirituality and transcendence than the average respondent. The report of this study gained an unusual amount of media attention. What probably helped was its inclusion in an exploratory report from the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy.⁹ The label ‘spiritual’ might not have hurt its popularity either; the more accurate label ‘(somewhat) religious/spiritual: others (i.e., non-Christian, non-Muslim)’ would have received less attention.

This kind of labelling creates a seemingly clear-cut religious landscape of (spiritual) seekers, (religious) dwellers, and non-believers.¹⁰ Yet, more sophisticated research shows that the population cannot be defined along these lines. 23% of the Dutch population do not identify themselves as belonging to a church, but do believe in God or some higher power. 70% of these believers without belonging’ pray once in a while; half of them believe in lucky numbers, mascots, astrology, and mediums.¹¹ Neither practices and beliefs considered as ‘traditional’, nor practices and beliefs regarded as ‘alternative’ are restricted to specific categories of people. The attention for what used to be called New Age but presently goes under the heading of New Spirituality is widespread in

⁹ Gerrit J. Kronjee and Martijn Lampert, “Leefstijlen En Zingeving,” *Geloven in Het Publieke Domein. Verkenningen Van Een Dubbele Transformatie* (Den Haag/Amsterdam: WRR/Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 184; 99-201; *ibid*.

¹⁰ Ulrike Popp-Baier, “From Religion to Spirituality-Megatrend in Contemporary Society or Methodological Artefact? A Contribution to the Secularization Debate from Psychology of Religion,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3, 1 (2010).

¹¹ Bernts, Dekker, and de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996-2006*.

contemporary culture. Those who occasionally read magazines on spiritual, alternative, or paranormal issues may be regarded as the *avant-garde* of this movement. Among this category (8% of the Dutch population) are non-believers, ex-church members, and church members. It is misleading to confine a widespread cultural phenomenon to a specific – purportedly ‘non-religious’ or ‘unaffiliated’ – portion of the population.

Apparently, ‘alternative’, ‘holistic’, or ‘esoteric’ world views are not restricted to the postmodern denomination of the ‘spiritual (non-affiliated)’. Christians and atheists, too, take an interest in spirituality. In addition, the label ‘spiritual’ contrasts with the desire to escape fixed categories, whereas the addition ‘non-affiliated’ may be premature with respect to the uncovering of new types of involvement. We are not so much interested in a postulated religious species as in the attention for religious and spiritual experience that transcends institutional and ideological boundaries. It is in this manner that we perceive the characterization of contemporary culture as ‘a world of seekers’. It seems there is some longing for religious experience both inside and outside the churches.

New and Old Spirituality

The term ‘spirituality’ originates in at least two discourses. In one case it is often referred to as ‘new’ or ‘alternative’. Although it is difficult to detect one common denominator, it seems that the quest for the inner self is often present in this discourse: an idea that was typical of the 1960s counterculture which has gone mainstream.¹² The phenomenon called *new* spirituality can be seen as the outcome of two trends in the religious landscape: pluralization and de-institutionalization.¹³ By pluralization we mean the increase in diversity of religions and world views; by de-institutionalization we mean the weakening of people’s commitment to fairly stable, binding, and authoritative religious institutes through which individual biographies are integrated into a system of religious convictions, values, and rules. These two processes – which have much in common yet can be distinguished from each other – are stimulating the current interest in spirituality. On the one hand, there is a transformation with respect to content: in the Netherlands, this is from Reformed and Catholic dominance towards greater diversity. On the other hand, we note

¹² Dick Houtman, “God in Nederland 1996-2006. Enkele Godsdienstsociologische Routines Ter Discussie,” *Religie & Samenleving* 3, 1 (2008).

¹³ Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, “New Age. Post-Christelijke Religie in Het Geseculariseerde Westen,” *Handboek Religie in Nederland* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008).

a structural transformation from religion as collective identity (denomination) to personal interest. The interest in spirituality partly reflects diversity – in other words, the diminished dominance of the Christian religion – and partly reflects fluidity – in other words, a less binding and encompassing commitment to any institutional framework.¹⁴

However, the concept of spirituality was, of course, already known in the Christian tradition. Since the seventeenth century, spirituality has been used, following the French usage, in the religious context to denote the relationship between man and God, especially its intimate, subjective aspects.¹⁵ Since then, various devotional traditions have appeared such as Carmelite, Benedictine, Franciscan, or Ignatian *spirituality*. This was originally a pejorative term for elitist religious exercises, a usage that is not the only notable parallel with the current, more general interest in spirituality.¹⁶ The importance of dogma and orthodoxy is currently called into question: people are open to what they may learn from other traditions, and in both the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ spirituality we find attention for the mystical unity of the universe, the abolition of the separation between object and subject, and a sort of ‘holistic’ view of life.¹⁷ It is no surprise that the modern interest in spirituality makes use of traditions both inside and at the margins of the Christian tradition. Traditional spiritual authors such as Meister Eckhart and traditional monasteries now appear within the wider, post-Christian spiritual milieu.¹⁸ Thus, the question is how different is the new phenomenon of spirituality actually from spiritual traditions inside or at the margins of Christianity? There is both continuity and discontinuity. For visitors to Christian spiritual centers, the concept ‘spiritual’ may refer to the ‘old’ as much as to the ‘new’ spirituality. Quite possibly, the distinction is not even made.

¹⁴ Kees de Groot, “How the Roman Catholic Church Maneuvers through Liquid Modernity,” *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity* (Münster: Lit, 2012).

¹⁵ Giuseppe Giordan, “Spirituality: From a Religious Concept to a Sociological Theory,” *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

¹⁶ Adam Possamai, *Religion and Popular Culture. A Hyper-Real Testament Gods (Humans and Religions)* (Brussel: Peter Lang, 2007; repr., 2007), p. 36.

¹⁷ Bernts, Dekker, and de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996-2006*, p. 120; Joep de Hart, *Zwevende Gelovigen. Oude Religie en Nieuwe Spiritualiteit* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011); John Burgess, “Detecting the Presence of God: Spirituality in a Birmingham Church,” *God at Ground Level. Reappraising Church Decline in the UK through the Experience of Grassroots Communities and Situations* (Frankfurt am Main etc.: Peter Lang, 2008).

¹⁸ Peter G.A. Versteeg, “Marginal Christian Spirituality: An Example from a Dutch Meditation Group,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21, 1 (2006).

Issue 1: Spirituality instead of religion? One issue in spirituality research is the question of whether religion is giving way to spirituality, the revolution thesis as put forward by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead.¹⁹ They expect religion – interpreted as an institution issuing rules about how to live from an assumed other world – to steadily lose ground to spirituality, which focuses, instead, on the subjective experience of one's own life. 'Life-as-religion' is here contrasted with 'subjective-life spirituality'. Many journalists and theologians have consented to this theory, even though it is little more than a hypothetical extrapolation of the results of a local British case study.

Dutch sociologists Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, too, have characterized new spirituality "as standing on its two feet and broken from the moorings of religious tradition."²⁰ In this approach, (new) spirituality is contrasted with (traditional Christian) religion.²¹ Yet, a prognosis would require support from historical comparison. The options for this are scarce: the content behind the label 'new' and 'alternative' is shifting. A combined analysis of several surveys does show a decrease in Christian faith and a growing acquaintance with yoga, homeopathy, paranormal psychology, and astrology among the Dutch population.²² 'Believing' in these phenomena has not increased, but that may be something that is asked too much for the supposedly undogmatic sphere of life affirming spirituality.

The British researchers Steve Bruce and David Voas also tried to test the revolution hypothesis via large-scale research on the individual level, and have rejected it in favor of the secularization thesis.²³ Their findings show that the crumbling of religious regimes continues; the so-called 'new spirituality' is a marginal phenomenon, not particularly relevant to society at large; and it is doubtful whether the many phenomena grouped under this label (a Christian Taizé group on the one hand, a yoga course on the other) are correctly placed.

¹⁹ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden [etc.]: Blackwell, 2005).

²⁰ Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, "The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981-2000," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, 3 (2007): p. 305.

²¹ Eileen Barker, "The Church without and the God Within: Religiosity and/or Spirituality?," *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life. Essays in Honour of James A. Beckford* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

²² Jos Becker and Joep de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen in Nederland. Verschuivingen in de Binding met de Kerken en de Christelijke Traditie* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2006); de Hart, *Zwevende Gelovigen. Oude Religie en Nieuwe Spiritualiteit*.

²³ David Voas and Steve Bruce, "The Spiritual Revolution: Another False Dawn for the Sacred," *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

A variation on the revolution thesis is the hypothesis that the interest in new spirituality is not a separate phenomenon, but depends on the religiosity traditionally present.²⁴ The results of a small-scale Dutch study seem to support this *compensation hypothesis*: interest in 'alternative religion' is said to be especially strong among former church members.²⁵ If this were the case, alternative religion would exist on the basis of church religion, and therefore the interest in alternative religion would diminish along with the process of secularization. Yet, findings of more recent surveys contradict the hypothesis that an individual's interest in spirituality compensates the loss of previous religious ties. Courses in spirituality are as popular among church members as they are among non-church members. The highest popularity is among both church-goers and non-church members believing in a non-empirical reality.²⁶ For the compensation hypothesis to hold, the whole range of holistic spirituality would have to be more popular among ex-Protestants and ex-Catholics than among other non-church members or the population as whole. This is not the case.²⁷ The compensation hypothesis does not have an impressive record.²⁸

Our research was not intended to test these hypotheses – that would require a different study – but they did provide a heuristic framework. What light do our results throw on this issue?

Issue 2: How different are religion and spirituality? Let us return to the question of the differences between religion and spirituality. In previous research, new spirituality, as opposed to traditional Christian spirituality, has often been characterized by a lack of structure, an orientation towards an internal rather than an external authority, and a low level of organization.²⁹ Characteristics such as self-determination and autonomy versus heteronomy, and individualism versus a focus on community and

²⁴ Sergej Flere and Andrej Kirbiš, "New Age, Religiosity, and Traditionalism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, 1 (2009).

²⁵ Ton Bernts and H. van der Hoeven, "Tussen Rooms en Redfield De Belangstelling voor Traditionele en Alternatieve Religie," *Sociale wetenschappen* 41, 2 (1998).

²⁶ Bernts, Dekker, and de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996-2006*, pp. 151; 71.

²⁷ de Hart, *Zwevende Gelovigen. Oude Religie En Nieuwe Spiritualiteit*.

²⁸ Cf. Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen in Nederland*, pp. 106-07.

²⁹ Peter Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church: Christian Spiritual Centres in the Netherlands," *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*; Adam Possamai, "A Profile of New Agers: Social and Spiritual Aspects," *Journal of Sociology* 36, 3 (2000).

communality also repeatedly come up.³⁰ Heelas and Woodhead contrast normative, collectivizing religion with subjective, individualistic spirituality. Yet – how individualistic is the new spirituality? And, how collectivist is old-fashioned religion?

As to the first question: Woodhead notes a striking absence of doctrinal authority in the spiritual milieu. She perceives a great freedom of belief, which she links to less male dominance.³¹ In the Dutch study on non-affiliated spirituality mentioned above, we also find the suggestion of ‘non-obligation’. However, in his field work in Nottinghamshire, Matthew Wood saw the mechanisms at work that had earlier been described by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu: in this milieu power is exercised differently, namely, by positing and propagating the Self.³² In this way no detailed doctrine is imposed, but a service-receptive soul is implanted. It is true that, unlike what is usual in the religious field, there is a notably low degree of long-term ‘formativeness’ (religious socialization), Wood says. But it would be wrong to simply copy the participants’ statement that in the spiritual milieu ‘everything is so individualistic’. Rather, the situation is that several sources of authority compete with each other on a more or less fraternal level, which results in people being socialized into the holistic spirituality.

There is a parallel with monasteries in this respect since, in their case too, religious *virtuosi* exercise a diverse and/or weak organized influence on their environment. A high degree of formativeness would correspond with the model of the modern parish, in which the faithful are initiated into a regulated way of behaving and believing.

This observation already forms part of the answer to the second of the two questions above: religious believers are not as ‘collectivist’ as the ideal type – and moreover judged by a specific orthodox norm – would have it. Qualitative research among Dutch Roman Catholics who make little or no use of the services of the parish (a growing segment) clearly shows “the loss or lack of a conservative–traditional church image, combined with an experimental quest for a modern-traditional attitude”

³⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA [etc.]: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Kronjee and Lampert, “Leefstijlen en Zingeving”; Mariët Meester, *Nieuwe Spiritualiteit* (Kampen: Kok Ten Have, 2008).

³¹ Linda Woodhead, “Why So Many Women in Holistic Spirituality?,” *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

³² Matthew Wood, “The Nonformative Elements of Religious Life: Questioning the ‘Sociology of Spirituality’ Paradigm,” *Social Compass* 56, 2 (2009); Michel Foucault, “Why Study Power. The Question of the Subject,” *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); P. Bourdieu, “Le Champ Religieux Dans Le Champ De Manipulation Symbolique,” *Les Nouveaux Clercs* (Genève: Labor et fides, 1985).

[our translation].³³ For at least 30 years, since the 1980s, 25% of all church members have no longer subscribed to traditional Christian statements.³⁴ On the individual level, one finds that religious believers, too, are engaged in *bricolage*; or, rather, even people who feel connected to a specific tradition are attracted to certain aspects of other traditions, and sometimes the origins of ideas and rituals are unclear or irrelevant.³⁵

Thus, for the sake of a clear analysis it would be better if we abandoned the distinction (both substantive and formal) between objective Christian religion on the one hand and subjective non-Christian spirituality on the other, and adopted, instead, a formal perspective on subjectivization processes (defining authenticity as correspondence with subjective experience, taking the self as authority) throughout the entire spiritual-religious spectrum, while not losing sight of the emergence of any new patterns that shape experience.

What indications do our research results provide about the relation between Christian traditions and new spirituality? What perceptions of 'religious' and 'spiritual' do we find?

THE CENTERS

The first part of our research was an inventory of those Christian spiritual centers that deliberately gear their programs to those who are interested in new forms of spirituality.³⁶ We analyzed the websites of 40 Catholic, 10 (Liberal) Protestant, and 7 mixed Christian centers and/or interviewed those responsible for the program. The majority of the centers were related to monasteries (30 to traditional monasteries and 3 to recently founded monasteries). 15 centers, although rooted in the Roman Catholic Church or in a Protestant church, now operate independently. 6 centers were independent branches of local parishes and 3 centers were related to parishes providing town chaplaincy. There are mostly no exact figures available about the social and religious characteristics of the visitors, but our informants did provide some estimates. There are small (about 40 visitors a year) and large (about 4000 visitors a year) centers. The average gender distribution is 70% woman versus 30% man. The age of the

³³ Ton Bernts, "'De Priester Is Geen Druide.' De Nederlandse Katholieke Kerk in de Posttraditionele Samenleving," *Sociologische Gids* 50, 2 (2003).

³⁴ Gerard Dekker, "Belonging without Believing," *Religie & Samenleving* 4, 1 (2009).

³⁵ Kees de Groot, "For Love of Faith: Patterns of Religious Engagement in a New Town," *Conversion in the Age of Pluralism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

³⁶ Willem Putman et al., "Christelijk Geïnspireerde Spirituele Centra," *Zelf Zorgen Voor Je Ziel. Over De Actualiteit Van Christelijke Spirituele Centra* (Almere: Parthenon, 2013).

visitors is rather high, between 55 and 70 years.³⁷ In general, the religious background of the visitors can be divided into one-third non-Christian, one-third Christian but not belonging to a congregation, and one-third Christian belonging to a congregation.

Next, we analyzed the mission statements and objectives of the centers. The main objective we discern is 'stimulating spiritual growth of the visitor'. The centers support the visitors' quest for meaning, in particular by facilitating the exchange of opinions and experiences. A good example of this objective is the mission statement of the Thomas-Center in Zwolle:

At the Thomas House, the door is open for anyone who dares to share his dreams with others; who wishes to explore with others his questions on faith and worldviews against the background of developments in society; and who seeks for forms of spirituality. Coming from the Christian tradition, the Thomas House opens its windows and doors for stories and inspiration from other traditions.... Your story next to the Bible story, next to the story of.... Being addressed in mind, heart, and soul.³⁸ [our translation]

The website of Thomas Faith and Culture in Oosterhout provides another telling example:

Our programs reach out to those who seek contemplation or deepening of insight in their lives. For anyone interested in activities at the crossroads of faith and spirituality and culture, arts, and music. Everyone is invited to join in. The program is flavored by the Christian tradition, but is not affiliated to a particular denomination or a religious ideology. It is not important whether you belong to a church. Our hope is that we offer a good program for all who are seeking sense in their lives from whatever perspective.³⁹ [our translation]

The principal aim of all centers is the spiritual development of the individual, not from the perspective of solving personal problems, but from the perspective of personal growth. Although the centers may be critical towards 'spiritual consumerism', they do relate to a 'new spiritual'

³⁷ At the (six) centers that focus on youth, the range of age is between 18 and 35 year.

³⁸ www.kloosterszwolle.nl/thomashuis

³⁹ www.thomasoosterhout.nl

characteristic of the visitors: their appreciation of personal quest and experience.

In classical terms, the method of these centers may be characterized as mystagogical.⁴⁰ The Christian tradition is considered as relevant for contemporary seekers. Rather than pressing visitors with this tradition, the teachers wish to open up this tradition to them. The tradition is used to foster the personal and spiritual growth of the visitors: people are guided on their way to the mystery of God.

This approach transcends a binary opposition between an objective religious tradition and a subjective spiritual experience. The centers seek to connect with subjective experience, to facilitate spiritual experience and to promote the sharing of these experiences. Their goal is not the replacement of tradition by subjective experience, but the fertile use of the religious tradition for the personal quest. Whatever the welcoming attitude of these centers, it is inspired by the spirituality rooted in their own religious tradition.

The activities of the centers may illustrate this. We analyzed the goals and the programs of 40 Catholic, 10 (Liberal) Protestant, and 7 mixed Christian centers. The content of the proposed activities can be divided into six themes: the Judeo-Christian tradition, other religious traditions, esoteric traditions, philosophy, (alternative) psychology, and diaconal/social orientation.

1: Judeo-Christian tradition. Examples of titles are: *Lectio Divina*; *Brother Sun and the Star*; *Christmas in the light of Francis*; a workshop on angels; *Advent Labyrinth*; the tradition of the Sisters of St. Clare; *Jesus and the Gnosis*; the celebration of Holy Week and Easter; *Christian meditation*; ‘*On the Road with a Psalm*’; and ‘*Jesus of Nazareth: a Window on Jesus*’. This theme is found in all 57 centers.

2: Other religious traditions. Here, we find for instance: Islam and Sufism; Hinduism; (Zen) Buddhism; Taoism; and nature religions. This theme is found in 27 centers.

3: Esoteric traditions. These could include: Chinese kinematics; Indian medicine; Etruscan wisdom; Tarot; Gurdjieff; Ouspensky; Gnosticism. This theme is found in 14 centers.

4: Philosophy. 14 centers offered programs on philosophers, for example: Plato, Spinoza, Derrida, and Foucault.

5: (Alternative) psychology: dream symbolism; Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP); Psychosynthesis; aggression control; inspiration in career; Family Constellations; dementia and spirituality; aging,

⁴⁰ Henk Witte, “Pastoraat En De Vraag Om Spiritualiteit,” *Redden Pastores Het? Religieus Leiderschap Aan Het Begin Van De Eenentwintigste Eeuw* (Budel: Damon, 2001), pp. 181-82.

bereavement; near-death experiences; nonviolent communication, etc. Found in 29 centers.

6: Diaconal/social orientation. Under this heading, activities aimed at reflection on or addressing social problems include: a program for caregivers; globalization and economics; meeting and holidays for guests with cancer; and 'From survival to life: for fellow sufferers of sexual abuse'. Found in 17 centers.

In these programs, the Christian tradition and the offer for the seekers coincide. The Christian tradition is paramount, but some themes might as well be seen in brochures of the alternative spiritual centers. The liberal Protestant centers, in particular, tend to pay attention to other religious and esoteric traditions, philosophy, and (alternative) psychology.

VISITORS

Method

The second and main part of our research was a survey among the visitors of these centers. The central question was: To what extent are visitors to Christian spiritual centers related to the new spirituality and to what extent to the Christian tradition? We asked about their religious affiliation and about their beliefs, experiences, and practices. 39 of the above-mentioned 57 centers participated in the research: 23 Roman Catholic, 9 Protestant, and 7 mixed Christian centers.⁴¹ In many aspects, Catholic centers are like the others. Yet, Protestant centers have a stronger denominational identity; Catholic centers are more open to non-Catholics than Protestant centers are to non-Protestants. In this chapter, we take all centers and their visitors together. We studied the programs and selected those activities that started in the Autumn of 2010 and were attended for at least a weekend.

Respondents

Almost 2,000 questionnaires were distributed to participants in the selected range of activities. Of these, we received 795 usable questionnaires back, a response of approximately 40%. The average age of the participants was 61.1 (range 23-90), with a standard deviation of 11.8. The age represented most was 65 years. 24% of the visitors were male, 76% female. 43% lived alone, 57% were married or living with someone.

⁴¹ Some centers declined to participate; others had ceased to exist. The six centers that focus on youth were excluded.

The average level of education was high: 26% have a university degree, 49% a degree from higher professional education, 9% finished pre-university secondary education, 10% have intermediate vocational education, 4% lower vocational education, and 1% primary education. (Of the Dutch population between ages 45 and 65, roughly 28% have a degree from higher professional education or university (Statistics Netherlands Statline)). 40% are still working, 60% are not, or no longer. The latter category is divided into 45% retired, 6% unemployed, and 9% home makers. Thus, the response group in our survey is exceptional, especially as regards age, gender, and education.⁴² Age and gender distribution resemble the data gathered from the centers. Versteeg,⁴³ who investigated a specific center in the Netherlands, also found this over representation of the elderly, women, and highly educated.

Measuring Instruments

The questionnaire was divided into four parts and consisted of a number of standard instruments, plus some questions formulated by ourselves on the basis of the literature and discussions with the centers. Part I contained questions about the visitors' social characteristics such as age, education, gender, and their situations regarding life and work. Questions in part II were on the institutional embedding of faith and spirituality. We asked about religious socialization and commitment to the local and to the universal Church. Part III addressed the content of faith/spirituality. In order to include as wide a content area as possible, we used Glock and Stark's five dimensions of religiosity.⁴⁴ In short, religious views relate to the central tenets of a tradition; religious knowledge refers to the knowledge of the main documents of a tradition; religious experiences can range from profound mystical experiences to a simple faith in God; religious practices can have a private character (praying in bed), but can also be a communal event (attending services); ethical prescriptions relate to directives from the belief system about how to behave towards other people.

⁴² Hessel Zondag and Michiel Maassen, "Meer dan de kerk. Een onderzoek naar motieven van weekeindkloosterlingen," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 26 (2010), pp. 201-220.

⁴³ Peter Versteeg, *Spirituality on the Margin of the Church: Christian Spiritual Centres in The Netherlands* (Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007), pp. 101-114; Peter Versteeg, "Marginal Christian Spirituality: An example from a Dutch Meditation Group," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21 (2006), pp. 83-97.

⁴⁴ Charles Y. Glock, "On the study of religious commitment," *Research supplement of religious education* 57 (1962), pp. 98-110; Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and society in tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965).

These dimensions can also be used to describe spirituality. In this part of the questionnaire we were able to use a number of standard instruments. The Spiritual Attitude and Involvement List (SAIL) is a questionnaire developed in research on coping, intended to measure spirituality along broad criteria.⁴⁵ It is suitable for religious as well as non-religious respondents and contains 26 statements on religious/spiritual views, experiences, and activities. Agreement was to be indicated on a 6-point Likert scale ('Not at all', 'Hardly', 'Somewhat', 'To a certain extent', 'To a high degree', 'To a very high degree'). A higher score indicates more agreement. The SAIL is constructed along seven subscales: Meaningfulness; Trust; Acceptance; Caring for Others; Connectedness with Nature; Transcendent Experiences, and Spiritual Activities. Three items of the Duke Religion Index⁴⁶ were used to measure intrinsic religiosity (saliency of religion for daily life). In order to measure ethical attitude, we presented the respondents with 13 statements measuring social engagement, largely derived from Schuyt's Philanthropy Scale.⁴⁷ For every statement, a 'yes' or 'no' answer was required. The Philanthropy Scale measures to what extent people feel responsible for their fellow humans and for society. Finally, we formulated a number of items ourselves gauging the level of pluralism of participants' faith or spirituality, their value-orientation, and the level of transcendence versus immanence.

Part IV addressed the effects of participating in the activities offered by the centers. On the basis of an earlier analysis of the centers' programs, we expected effects on the body, the self, the other, and faith /spirituality.

Results

We start with presenting the results regarding the interrelationship of Christian tradition and new spirituality, using the distinction between

⁴⁵ Eltica de Jager Meezenbroek and B. Garssen, *Informatie over de spirituele attitude en interesse lijst (SAIL)* (Utrecht: Helen Dowling Instituut, 2007); Eltica de Jager Meezenbroek et al., "Measuring spirituality as a Universal Human Experience: Development of the Spiritual Attitude and Involvement List (SAIL)," *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology* 30, 2 (2012), pp. 141-167.

⁴⁶ Harald Koenig, G.R. Parkerson, Jr., and K.G. Meador, "Religion Index for Psychiatric Research," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 154, 6 (1997), pp. 885-886.

⁴⁷ Theo N.M. Schuyt, *Het ontwikkelen van een filantropieschaal* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2006); Theo Schuyt, René Bekkers, and Jan Smit, "The Philanthropy Scale: a sociological perspective in measuring new forms of Pro Social Behavior," *Social Work & Society* 8, 1 (2010), pp. 121-135.

seekers and dwellers. To this, we add a presentation using the perspective of religious pluralism.

Outside seekers, inside seekers, and dwellers The vast majority of visitors (85%) were socialized as Christians. The next question then is of course: what about the participants' *current* commitment to a church in general, and a local religious community in particular? 51% of the participants affirmed that they 'belong to a church or to a community that holds a particular spirituality or worldview'. A second question that we thought would throw some light on institutional embedding referred to the frequency with which people attend church services. Compared with the average in the Netherlands, 16% ('regularly' plus '(almost) every week'), church attendance is very high (53%) among our respondents.⁴⁸

We noted that a majority of 64% feel committed (strongly or somewhat) to a parish or congregation. Besides current commitment to a parish or congregation we also asked the participants about any earlier commitment. A reasonably large category (32%) no longer feel committed to a local religious community, but did in the past. Apart from these, the centers also attract people who have never felt such a commitment (11% of participants). The largest category (52%), however, is that of people who both then and now have been committed to a parish or congregation. If we add to these the category of 6% new arrivals, we find that 58% feel committed to a parish or congregation.

A large proportion of our respondents (54%) were disappointed in what the churches have to offer in the field of spirituality and attention to their own spiritual perceptions and experiences. It is striking, however, that the local faith community is judged less negatively. About 40% of the participants experience too little attention and space for their own personal questions and quest in their congregation. 68% regard the activities in the center a welcome addition to the spiritual activities in the local church.

These data provide insight into the proportion of dwellers and inside and outside seekers. About 60% consider themselves committed to a parish or congregation and about 40% do not. Thus, dwellers and outside-seekers meet in the centers surveyed. Dwellers can be distinguished further into those for whom the activities of the centers are a welcome addition to the parish and those for whom the centers are a compensation for a perceived deficiency in the local congregation. Thus, we discerned three categories of visitors: outside-seekers (about 40%), inside-seekers dissatisfied with the local church (about 15%), and dwellers who regard their participation as part of their participation in the local church (about 45%). These three categories obviously differ from each other, especially when it comes to structural features (affiliation with

⁴⁸ Bernts, Dekker, and de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996-2006*.

a parish and church), but there are also some interesting substantive agreements. The items about values that give meaning to life could be reduced – on the basis of a principal component analysis⁴⁹ – to three basic values: focus on a deeper reality, involvement in social relationships, and hedonism. The three groups do not differ with respect to these three values. They also share the belief in a deeper reality within the self: 84% of the outside seekers, 86% of the inside seekers, and 82% of the dwellers. The same accounts for the belief in life after death. Here the percentages are 49%, 56% and 54%, respectively.

The effects of participation in the activities of the centers could be clustered – again, based on a principal components analysis⁵⁰ – in three basic effects. ‘Self-knowledge and self-development’ is the label for all those items that refer to an increase in self-knowledge and the development of mental and spiritual powers. ‘Deepening of faith’ subsumes all items on the deepening of the spiritual and religious life with the Christian tradition as the frame of reference. The third component, ‘the other’, is about commitment to and caring for others. The outside and inside seekers reported more effects on the self. Inside seekers and dwellers reported more impact on the deepening of faith. With respect to the latter component, there were no differences between the three categories.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the inside seekers stand out in their appreciation for the activities they participated in. They report most that the workshop, weekend, or course in which they participated contributed to their personal quest.

Religious pluralism. The number one characteristic of the new spirituality is generally considered to be a pluralist attitude,⁵¹ also referred to as syncretism, *bricolage*, or do-it-yourself religion.⁵² Below we present several results that together sketch a picture of the level of pluralism in the participants’ religious or spiritual life.

A first way to sketch the picture is using a self-definition of being religious and/or spiritual. 60% call themselves ‘religious’, and 72% ‘spiritual’. Following various studies in which attempts were made to mark the distinction between religiosity and spirituality,⁵³ we have

⁴⁹ Varimax rotation, missing pairwise, mineigen=1; loading >0.40; explained variance: 57.5% Cronbach’s alpha’s: 0.69, 0.71 and 0.74.

⁵⁰ Oblique rotation, missing pairwise, factors= 3; loading >0.40: explained variance: 60,8%. Cronbach’s alpha’s: 0.96, 0.82 and 0.89.

⁵¹ Mariët Meester, *Nieuwe spiritualiteit* (Kampen: Kok Ten Have, 2008).

⁵² Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, “Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket. The social and public significance of New Age spirituality,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21 (2006) pp. 201-222.

⁵³ Eileen Barker, “The Church without and the God within: religiosity and/or spirituality?” *The centrality of religion in social life. Essays in honour of*

distinguished four categories on the basis of the answers to the questions relating to a religious or spiritual outlook.

Table 1. Distribution ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Religious’

	‘religious’	NL	Visitors	not ‘religious’	NL	Visitors
‘spiritual’	spiritual and religious	25	48	spiritual, not religious	19	24
not ‘spiritual’	religious, not spiritual	16	12	neither religious nor spiritual	40	16

The first group (+R+S) considers itself religious as well as spiritual. This group consists of 48% of the respondents. The second group (+R-S) considers itself religious, but not spiritual. This group of ‘pure’ religious people consists of 12%. The third group (+S-R) considers itself spiritual, but not religious. 24% of the respondents are included in this ‘pure’ spiritual group. The last group of non-religious and non-spiritual respondents (-R-S) consists of 16%. Research among the Dutch population has shown that in the Netherlands these four categories are distributed as follows: religious and spiritual: 25%; exclusively religious: 16%; exclusively spiritual: 19%; neither: 40% (see table: the figures below NL).⁵⁴ Thus, the visitors to our centers are both more spiritual and more religious than average, but slightly less exclusively religious.

These self-definitions from our respondents proved to be meaningful when we linked them to the other data about our participants’ religious or spiritual life. We plotted the differences and correspondences between these four categories in relation to their scores on all other

James A. Beckford (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 187-202; Gerrit J. Kronjee and Martijn Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving,” *Geloven in het publieke domein. Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie* (Den Haag/Amsterdam: WRR/Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 171-208; Penny L. Marler, and C. Kirk Hadaway, “Being religious or being spiritual in America: a zero-sum proposition,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, 2 (2002), pp. 289-300; Leila Shahabi et al., “Correlates of self-perceptions of spirituality in American adults,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 24, 1 (2002), pp. 59-68; Brian J. Zinnbauer et al., “Religion and spirituality: unfuzzifying the fuzzy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, 4 (1997), pp. 549-564.

⁵⁴Joantine Berghuijs, Jos Pieper, and Cok Bakker. “Being ‘Spiritual’ and being ‘Religious’ in Europe: diverging ways of life?” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, 1 (2013), pp. 15-32.

variables, and found that each category has its own profile. We are summarizing these profiles below.

The *religious but not spiritual* are rooted in the Christian tradition, are strongly committed to the parish, and have a strong desire to deepen their faith. Their favorite magazine is *Volzin*, a magazine about achieving a meaningful life, with origins in the Reformed and Catholic (Dominicans) tradition.

Scores from the *religious and spiritual* tend towards the average because this is the largest category of participants. Yet, a clear profile can nevertheless be discerned. These participants strongly identify with their church and religion, yet also incorporated elements of the new spirituality into their views. This category is the most religiously and spiritually 'committed', and it is this category for which religion or spirituality are most salient, judging from the respondents' excellence in transcendent experiences, religious activities, effects of participating in the programs offered, and the significance of religion/spirituality for daily life. Their favorite journal is *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven*, a journal on spirituality, mainly from a Christian perspective.

The *exclusively spiritual* are relatively young, and this category includes even less men than average. They are farthest removed from the Christian tradition and have affinity with other traditions: Buddhism, new spirituality, and humanism. This corresponds to a high level of pluralism. Commitment to a parish or congregation is the lowest among them; commitment to spiritual life is high. This commitment affects their daily life; they report a relatively great number of religious experiences and religious activities. Their main focus is self-actualization. Their favorite magazines are *mindstyle* magazines like *Happinez* and *Psychology Magazine*.

Those participants who are *neither religious nor spiritual* form a relatively 'lukewarm' category, having no strikingly high scores on any aspect. They do, however, have strikingly low scores on many aspects: they have very little belief in a transcendent reality; they have few transcendent experiences; and are not particularly active in the area of religion/spirituality.

Three conclusions are made on the basis of the profiles. First, the four categories are on a continuum. At one end, there is the commitment to parish and Christianity ('religious but not spiritual'), at the other, the adoption of new forms of spirituality ('spiritual but not religious'). In-between there is the category 'religious and spiritual'. The category 'neither religious nor spiritual' does not have a clear profile yet.

Second, *spiritual and religious* people are characterized by their lived religion. A cluster analysis underscores this finding. This cluster analysis based on all ordinal variables that could be constructed regarding beliefs, experiences, practices, values, motives, and effects divided the

respondents into three groups: high (241 respondents), middle (432), and low (131) scoring.⁵⁵ The group 'high' is characterized by more than average scores on being spiritual and on being religious, on having experiences of the transcendent, on being involved in religious activities, and on reporting effects of the activities regarding self-realization, deepening of faith, and connectedness to humanity. Our results are also supported by the data from the Religion Monitor Survey, carried out in 21 countries. Klein and Huber⁵⁶ report "that in several cultures those seeing themselves as both spiritual and religious score higher in all measured expressions of spirituality/religiosity than the groups of the exclusively spiritual or the exclusively religious. The latter two groups hold characteristic pantheistic or theistic patterns of religious expressions."

Finally, it seems that our respondents associate the term 'religious' with faith and commitment to a religion, especially Christianity, while the term 'spiritual' is apparently connected to both the experiential dimension of religion, and with a focus on the self. Spirituality can refer to both the Christian and other traditions. However, the semantic fields can vary by country.⁵⁷ In the southern countries of Europe, spirituality is seen as more compatible with religiosity; in the northern countries, it is seen as more exclusive. Palmisano⁵⁸ supports the idea of proximity between new spirituality and Christianity in the Catholic south of Europe. Italian research seems to show that the emerging new spirituality in Italy may be incorporated into Catholicism. Italians are religious and spiritual. This close relation is apparent especially in popular religiosity and the charismatic movement. These indications resonate with our findings. Visitors of Catholic centers are more prone to call themselves 'spiritual' than visitors of Protestant centers. Visitors of Catholic centers are more interested in motives and effects related to the self than visitors of Protestant centers. They also practice yoga and breathing exercises more often.

A second approach to pluralism is provided by the relationship between transcendence and immanence. Versteeg⁵⁹ points out that in the

⁵⁵ See appendix.

⁵⁶ C. Klein, S. Huber, *What does it mean to be spiritual, what to be religious? Comparing self-identifications, proportions, and correlates crossnationally*. Paper read at IAPR-conference. Bari, Italy, 2011.

⁵⁷ Philip Hughes, "Spirituality and Religion in Europe," *Vista. Quarterly bulletin of research-based information on mission in Europe*, 16 (2014), pp. 1-3.

⁵⁸ Stefania Palmisano, "Challenging Catholicism: The significance of spirituality in Italy," *Journal for the study of spirituality* 3, 1 (2013), pp. 18-23.

⁵⁹ Peter Versteeg, "Spirituality on the margin of the Church: Christian spiritual centres in The Netherlands," *A sociology of spirituality* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 101-114.

new spirituality, God is sought within the self, not outside it. Heelas⁶⁰ also argues that in the new spirituality the experience of the self – felt to be divine, spiritual, and sacral – is the starting point from which to attain an authentic life. Heelas and Woodhead⁶¹ speak of a divine core (the Self), which is linked to a universal spirit, energy, or life force. We measured *belief in a transcendent reality* by asking: ‘Do you believe in God or a supernatural reality?’ We measured *the experience of an immanent transcendence* by asking: ‘Do you believe in a deeper reality within yourself?’ Many (67%) of the participants in our study believe both in the transcendent God and in the ‘God within’ (immanent transcendence). Apparently, the two concepts combine perfectly well, and people see no distinction between theistic and holistic spirituality. The majority have neither a theistic nor a pantheistic, but a panentheistic conception of the divine.⁶² The divine is both transcendent and immanent. Both visitors who are committed to a parish or congregation and those who are not believe in a deeper reality within them. 80% of those who have never been committed to a local community believe this ‘definitely’, as well as 83% of those who are no longer committed. We find similar figures for those who have always been (82%) and those who are now (80%) committed to their local congregation. There is a distinction, however, with respect to belief in a transcendent God. Those who are more committed to the local congregation tend to believe more firmly in God or a supernatural reality. Of those who were never committed, 51% believe this firmly; 67% of those who no longer are; 80% of those who are now or have always been. Inside seekers and dwellers believe both in a deeper reality within them and, firmly, in God or a supernatural reality. In this particular way, they excel in a pluralist attitude.

A third instrument is the Pluralism Scale. We used three statements to measure a pluralist attitude: ‘It is good to experiment with insights and practices from different traditions’; ‘There are many sources of wisdom we can draw on’; ‘You can combine different insights and practices into a philosophy that suits you’.

The answers to these three questions ranged from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’. By means of component analysis we were

⁶⁰ Paul Heelas, *The New Age movement. The celebration of the self and the sacralisation of modernity*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

⁶¹ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The spiritual revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Malden [etc.]: Blackwell, 2005).

⁶² Joseph Pieper and Hans van der Ven, “The inexpressible God. God Images among Students of Dutch Catholic Secondary Schools,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 11, 2 (1998), pp. 63-79.

able to combine the three into one component.⁶³ This component had a high average score of 4.2 (on a scale of 1-5). 82% agree with these statements. Although this figure is very high, there is still some differentiation. Those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious (90%) excel as do the outside seekers (87%). Those who consider themselves as religious but not spiritual (74%) and the dwellers (75%) present the lowest scores.

A fourth indication of a pluralistic orientation is provided by the answers to the question: 'Have you ever participated in an activity in a spiritual center with a non-Christian signature?' 40% of the respondents never did; 60% did. Of those who define themselves as spiritual but not religious, 88% reflected this desire to widen the scope, whereas of those who call themselves religious but not spiritual, 40% did. Outside seekers (75%) confirmed they participated in those centers more than inside seekers (48%) and dwellers (50%).

A final, unintended, indicator of a pluralist attitude was provided by the answers to the question on the *preference in religious or secular movements* ('My closest affinity is with...'). Only 66.9% of the participants answered this question as intended, namely, by choosing only one option. A large category of respondents checked two or more options. Christianity and Buddhism is an often-mentioned combination. This may indicate that a certain amount of *multiple religious belonging*⁶⁴ is not unusual.

These five indicators suggest a pluralist attitude: a high average score on the pluralism scale, participating in activities of non-Christian spiritual centers, and a panentheistic conception of the divine. Three categories could be discerned. A first group constructs their religious identity more orientated to new spirituality, a second group combines elements of new spirituality with the Christian tradition, and a third group is more oriented to the Christian tradition. But this group is not exclusively oriented to Christianity. Their score on the pluralism scale is rather high.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The centers we studied are deliberately reaching out to a world of seekers. The Christian tradition prevails in the programs offered, but the centers

⁶³ Principal component analysis with varimax rotation; missing pairwise; minimal eigenvalue = 1; loading > 0.40; explained variance = 70.6%. Cronbach's alpha = 0.80.

⁶⁴ Manuela Kalsky, "Het flexibele geloof van Pi. Meervoudige religieuze identiteiten als toekomstvisioen," *Buigzame gelovigen. Essays over religieuze flexibiliteit* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2008), pp. 64-73.

pay attention to other religions, esoteric traditions, psychology, and philosophy as well. The dominant concept of spirituality seems to be something that refers to the 'inside' of religion. Apparently, knowledge of and experience in other traditions is supposed to foster spiritual and personal growth. Spirituality is not regarded in opposition to religion.

Those participating in the programs offered make up a specific category. Their education level is high, they were often socialized within the Christian tradition, and they are usually involved in a local religious community. Among them, three categories of belonging can be discerned: outside seekers, inside seekers, and dwellers. These categories of belonging correspond with three categories of believing: new spirituality, new spirituality and Christian, Christian.⁶⁵

Against the background of the three hypotheses formulated earlier in this chapter, we can't conclude that spirituality is taking the place of religion, but we do see that spirituality is significant for our respondents. It resonates with religious faith – although the respondents distance themselves from the church of their childhood – and it relates to the exploration of the Self. Our finding that the participants largely belong to the Christian population only seemingly supports the compensation hypothesis. More detailed analysis of our data shows that interest in the new spirituality does not depend on earlier religious socialization. Most of the 'exclusively spiritual' participants have never been involved in a religious community. Neither do our findings sustain the revolution hypothesis: age and background of the participants do not really point to a great spiritual revival versus religious decline. It is possible that signs of such a revival can be seen elsewhere, but positive effects for the Self, for personal consciousness, and for the healing of body, spirit, and mind were mentioned alongside an enhanced acceptance of life and an intensified relation with God, their church, and other people. Effects in terms of subjective life spirituality and the reflexive project of the Self were intermingled with more traditional consequences of contemplation, such as going into retreat, formulated in terms of 'life-as-religion'.

Our results indicate that the visitors to these centers take up, or possibly integrate, in their world view elements that are often considered typical of the new spirituality. The high scores on 'satisfaction' show that on this aspect the centers do manage to hit the target, whereas this is clearly less so with regular parishes. We did not perceive a tension between 'religion' on the one hand and '(new) spirituality' on the other. Our findings suggest, instead, a process of gradual shifts in which old and new elements are incorporated into a contemporary approach. Further research could identify this process and the direction in which it is going.

⁶⁵ See findings of de Hart and Dekker elsewhere in this volume.

This religious evolution, as this process might be called, raises several theological questions which should be addressed, and are addressed, elsewhere. One set of questions clusters around the tension between the subjective and the objective pole of religion: the relation between personal faith and doctrinal authority, between authority localized in the Self and authority localized in a church. Another set of questions clusters around the relation of Christianity with other traditions: how open is Christianity to other traditions, such as Buddhism, humanism, and alternative psychology, and how should we evaluate theologically the use of elements from the Christian tradition outside churches?

Historically, the Christian tradition has contributed to the formation of the Self. The cultivation of the Self can also be seen in types of spirituality that are not directly related to the Christian tradition. Those who are part of this tradition can listen to the voices of the various traditions, discern them, and articulate the voice of their own strand within Christian spirituality. This is at least the strategy we find in the Christian spiritual centers in the Netherlands.

Within the Roman Catholic sphere, these centers move in creative ways and allow some free space to deal with the process of individualization. Thus, these centers continue ways of operating that have been, and still are, common in religious orders and congregations. Abbeys, convents, and monasteries have often been places for the personal exploration of spirituality. In this light, the characterization of religion as subordinating life to normative directives appears as a caricature. These centers continue the monastic tradition of individual responsibility, personal experience, and exploring the Christian tradition in all its varieties.

Openness to the contemporary life-world does not imply that the Christian heritage is thrown overboard. Yet, these centers do not exclude visitors who have done this or are contemplating doing this. Roman Catholic and (orthodox) Protestant centers that do not address seekers in particular, draw a closer connection between Christian values, norms, and beliefs, on the one hand, and the expression of personal experience, on the other. Recently, individual Dutch bishops have recommended this approach to Roman Catholic parishes.⁶⁶ Both types of spiritual centers are faced with the same task to keep the quest for meaning open: to do justice to the individual person of the visitor and to treat religious and other traditions with respect. We expect that this is the fundamental approach pastoral practice may learn from these centers.

Our project challenges two competing practical-theological views on churches and secularization. According to one view, the Western world

⁶⁶ Fred van Iersel and Kees Slijckerman (eds.), *Kleine geloofsgroepen. Wegen naar een vitale parochie* (Heeswijk: Abij van Berne, 2011).

is 'totally secularized', marked by a 'total rejection of God' leading to an obsession with money, power, and pleasure.⁶⁷ In contrast with this idea of 'spiritual emptiness' and a culture of 'selfishness',⁶⁸ the enterprise of studying the 'mismatch' between Church and seekers suggests that people are in fact searching for spirituality, but are doing so outside the ecclesial premises. This view implies the possibility that the Church may be able to respond to these needs and attract significant portions of the population (again). We severely doubt the viability of this option. Neither the religious trends in Dutch society as a whole, nor the outcomes of our study among participants in courses on spirituality, suggest that a *Reconquista* of de-churched Dutch society is likely.

Both from a theological and a sociological perspective, two more specific scenarios for these centers present themselves: a 'seekers' scenario and a 'dwellers' scenario. The first scenario fits with the conviction that the world of seekers deserves a willing attitude from the part of the Church and with the expectation that the cultural phenomenon of spiritual seeking will persist. The high and increasing appreciation for what these centers and other abbeys, convents, and monasteries have to offer may sustain this outlook. The viability of these centers is, however, precarious. This will depend on the extent to which these centers succeed in surviving a period in which religious communities (the supply side) are threatened with extinction, and in which the number of church members (the demand side) continues to drop. In this situation, potentials for growth are probably in addressing those outside the Church.

The second scenario expects an ongoing process of secularization. Christian spiritual centers might, paradoxically, benefit from this trend, since a minority position could foster the remaining believers to invest in their faith.⁶⁹ Secularity, in this sense, might produce religion: a critical attitude towards modern culture can promote the wish to deepen one's faith. Theological positions with a more pessimistic outlook on today's world will support this perspective. Yet, in this case, the expectations for these centers will not be higher.

In short, the spiritual centers we studied offer the opportunity for inside and outside seekers to deepen their faith. A threat is that the focus on personal choice and the broad spectrum of traditions on offer may

⁶⁷ Cardinal Godfried Danneels, "At the Crossroads of Faith and Culture. Challenges Facing the Catholic Church Today," *Annual Lecture Christianity and Society 2012* (Tilburg: Tilburg University, 2012).

⁶⁸ Everard de Jong, "Inleiding," *Kleine Geloofsgroepen. Wegen Naar Een Vitale Parochie* (Heeswijk: Abdij van Berne, 2011).

⁶⁹ Peter Achterberg et al., "Dialectiek van secularisering: Hoe de afname van Christelijke religiositeit samengaat met een sterkere nadruk op haar publieke belang in achttien westerse landen," *Sociologie* 5 (2009), 324-342.

hinder an essential element in the spiritual process: the openness towards an external voice, God.⁷⁰ The challenge for these centers is to accompany seekers using all the resources the Christian tradition has to offer. The centers we studied radiate a positive attitude towards seeking but may risk the connection with the institutional Church. An alternative attitude can be found in centers which have a more specific Catholic profile. Within the context of radical pluralism, this position would be an alternative niche strategy for a minority church promoting an intensification of the personal faith of dwellers and inside seekers.

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⁷⁰ Willem Marie Speelman, "Vrije spiritualiteit? Een zware last!," in *Zelf zorgen voor je ziel. De actualiteit van christelijke spirituele centra*, eds. Kees de Groot, Jos Pieper, and Willem Putman (Almere: Parthenon, 2013).

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APPENDIX: k-means cluster analysis

Final Cluster Centers

Variable (scale)	Cluster		
	1 (middle)	2 (high)	3 (low)
antiparochie	15,24	15,87	14,24
intrinsiek	12,02	13,31	12,05
sailtranscerva	13,68	19,72	13,47
sailvertrzin	24,41	27,26	23,93
sailzorg	18,54	20,30	18,21
sailaanv	18,40	19,68	18,23
sailspiract	15,78	19,04	15,34
sailnatuur	10,01	10,98	9,74
pluralisme	12,24	12,97	11,69
actoosters	7,05	7,91	6,49
actchristelijk	5,14	5,83	5,52
actpara	3,39	3,68	3,44
waardensociaal	16,58	17,62	16,41
waardenhedonisme	10,83	11,66	10,54
waardendieper	4,15	5,89	3,81
personalisering	15,36	17,19	13,21
motivatiezelf	18,88	16,93	20,38
motivatieander	14,01	13,41	14,22
religieus	1,43	1,33	1,44
spiritueel	1,30	1,15	1,44
effectzelf	69,62	85,16	42,64
effectgeloof	15,08	18,04	11,22
effectander	19,23	22,84	12,90

CHAPTER IV

IMAGINING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN A WORLD OF SEEKERS

STAF HELLEMANS

A FUTURE FOR THE MAJOR CHURCHES?

After five decades of relentless decline in most Western countries, we need to ask whether major churches will still exist in the near future. In a time of seekers, can a church appeal to major parts of the population? And, if so, how? Or, will the major churches continue to decline with the result that organized religion in the future will only be offered by small religious organizations and movements and by individual religious entrepreneurs? This is an important and complex issue that will be explored here tentatively for the case of the Catholic Church. More particularly, I will explore some crucial opportunities and threats for the Catholic Church in re-establishing itself as a major minority church. If this is possible at all, it will certainly be a new type of church and one that is no longer in a position to demand submission to a total institution. Instead, it will have to bet on the attractiveness of and free access to a religious offer which is attuned to the life projects of seekers.

The analysis will develop in three broad strokes. First, I will analyze the new context that accounts for the precarious situation which the Catholic Church and the other main churches find themselves in since the 1960s. They are squeezed between three disrupting forces. First, individual persons are no longer churchly by birth, but have become seekers who are looking for personal fulfillment in all directions. Second, the religious field has become turbulent. It has become pluralized and particularly innovative: every person can inject new forms of religiosity in the field and every form changes quickly. Third, religions as traditions and religion as a distinct field are dissolving. The main churches, with their heavy infrastructure, have difficulties, organizationally and doctrinally, adjusting to the new situation.

In the second part, I will review some of the ideas and proposals on church growth that are circulating outside Catholicism. Especially in the United States, there has been a lively discussion going on since the 1960s. It started within the evangelical wing of Protestantism with the question: Which principles and strategies should pastors and lay evangelists follow in order to expand existing congregations and successfully plant new congregations? In the 1970s, academics related to the main churches

joined the discussion. They tried to explain why some churches grew while others declined. The debate on 'church growth and decline' has continued ever since, multiplying its perspectives and spreading also to Europe. I must confess that I expected more when I started to gather material on the church growth and decline discussion in the United States. In the end, what I found was that it is almost exclusively focused on growth of local congregations, neglecting the contribution of higher church levels in multi-level churches, and neglecting also the opening up in advanced modernity of other ways of communicating religion.

The third section will be devoted to the Catholic Church. Its decline is only (a minor) part of the story. The more important part is that the Church, under the new conditions of late modernity, is forced to devise new forms. Indeed, with the passing away of ultramontane mass Catholicism, the church formation that started in the 19th century and lasted until the 1950s, a new Church and a new Catholicism are emerging. Which new forms are arising? And what are the demands and opportunities present in advanced modernity? Four demands/opportunities and one internal threat will be highlighted. First, I will draw some inferences of our review of the debate on church growth and decline for the renewal of the Catholic Church on the local level where the world of the parishes is in great disarray. Second, I turn to the higher, supra-local levels of the Church. As a highly visible world church, the Catholic Church has the resources to appeal, in our age, beyond its core constituency to a worldwide public. Third, and most crucially, since much of the old religious offer has lost appeal, the Catholic Church has to devise a (re)new(ed) religious offer in order to convince part of the public to connect to the Catholic Church and even to become, in one way or another, Catholic. Fourth, although tempting for the church leadership, it is important not to reduce Catholicism to the Catholic Church and to establish a fruitful relation between the institutional church and a wider Catholic milieu. Finally, it will be essential to avoid a standstill between conservative and liberal Catholics. The failure to find a way forward 'beyond conservatism and liberalism' in the 1960s and 1970s explains much of why the Church has been in crisis and devolution since 1960. The overview already shows that becoming a new major minority church, a church with a small direct constituency yet with a large outward appeal, will not be easy. The opposite outcome, which is equally if not more likely, would be the withdrawal into a sectarian remnant of a once major church.

A WORLD OF SEEKERS

From Believers to Seekers

In the past decades, the relationship between the Catholic Church and its following has changed beyond recognition.

First of all, as has been touched upon already by many authors,¹ religion has become an individual option, an act of choice. Consequently, the relation between church and following has been reversed. While the Catholic Church institution could use state power before 1800 and informal power in the Catholic milieu after 1800 to force people to submit, to some degree, to the Catholic Church, people nowadays take a far more autonomous stance vis-à-vis the Church. They are now free to accept or reject what is presented.

Second, although some are embracing the Church's teachings with gusto, most people now view the Church's rulings and activities with reserve. In a strict sense, there is no Catholic following – people who merely follow – anymore, no total membership 'from cradle to grave', only a public with different degrees of attention and commitment.

Third, the new situation has put an end to the antagonism, so pervasive in the 19th and early 20th centuries, between two power blocs: a deferent, sympathizing church following, on the one hand, and a distant, even hostile conglomerate of outsiders, on the other hand. Many outsiders are now sometimes willing to lend a favorable ear to the Church. All can become, in principle, interested, but there is, at the same time, no guarantee that those having stepped in will remain. The constitution of a worldwide public – "the whole world is watching" – has become a reality, as both the enthusiasm around the Second Vatican Council and the scandals of child abuse by priests have shown.

Fourth, entry into the Church by individual decision rather than by birth changes the very way not only how one is becoming Catholic, but also what it is all about. Becoming Catholic by birth in the past meant that one was raised in a Catholic state and society (prior to 1789) or in a Catholic sub-society (between 1789 and 1960). Church and (sub)-society, in which one was born, took precedence. However, becoming Catholic by individual decision means that the individual 'human condition' becomes the alpha and omega on which religious, in this case Catholic, commitment is based. Hence, personal identity and fulfilment constitute the frame for religious activity. It is anchored in the life of the individual person and in his/her life-world, and is thus extraneous to the Church and its world.

¹ See a.o.: Hans Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012).

Fifth, this change of framework in handling religion not only has consequences for the Catholic Church – the issue will be at the center of attention in the third section – but also for the individual person. By moving the frame of lived religion out of the Church to the individual person, i.e., the process of individualization, one not only gets more freedom to choose a religion, to select in a religion what one likes and doesn't like and, eventually, to quit as one pleases; one also loses, at the same time, the safe, if at times dull and oppressive, anchor of the Church and the Catholic world. One becomes, generically speaking, a seeker. In principle, seeking never stops. To be sure, there are a lot of pragmatic stops, e.g., indifference to religion, having close friends in a congregation, becoming less motivated to switch or quit as one ages. Yet, many church-dwellers also sense a kind of homelessness. The new basic condition is, socially, one of 'longing without belonging', one without unqualified identification² and, temporally, one of longing without definite end.

Sixth, seeking is here interpreted as a universal and characteristic feature of most human beings in our time. It is, of course, also interesting to analyze seekers as a specific category, as non-church-dwellers³ (see the chapters by Halman and de Hart and Dekker). Yet, I want to stress the common ground of both categories: most of the church-dwellers have become seekers no less than those seeking at the margins of or outside organized religion (see the chapters by de Hart and Dekker and de Groot and Pieper). We live nowadays in a world of seekers.

From Monopoly/Oligopoly to a Turbulent Religious Field

It is not only the religious person who has changed. The religious field in which the Catholic Church and Catholicism are operating has also changed. Since Roman times, Christianity had a monopoly in Europe and in Byzantium – only Judaism survived at great costs. After the Reformations, the monopolies were continued in a confessional garb. Only in some Protestant countries like the Dutch Republic, Great Britain, and the Anglo-Saxon immigration lands were minor churches and sects allowed to exist. The separation of church and state after 1789 didn't, at first, revolutionize the religious field. Until about 1960, with the exception of the United States and to a lesser extent Australia and Canada, church

² Staf Hellemans, "From 'Catholicism against Modernity' to the Problematic 'Modernity of Catholicism'," *Ethical Perspectives* 8, 2 (2001), p. 124.

³ See: Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven. Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

monopolies and oligopolies remained in place, the biggest innovation being the slow increase of the non-churched.

It is only after 1960 that the make-up of the religious field begins to change drastically and in an epochal way. First, in the sphere of heavily institutionalized religion, a shift is occurring from main churches to smaller churches and sects. The main churches are declining and, at the same time, the foundation and prospering of new religious groups has never been easier. As a result, the number of small churches and sects is ever increasing. Second, religions with less institutional armor have also appeared on the scene. There is an ever-growing number of so-called 'new religious movements', most of them Christian, but also genuine new ones in the wake of New Age or neo-paganism. Third, all major religions of the world have taken hold in the West, not only direct transplantations (like Islam or Tibetan Buddhism), but also altered forms (like 'Western Buddhism'). Fourth, the stamina of innovation in the religious field would be greatly underestimated if one is merely considering the collective level, the multiplication of religious organizations and movements. Pluralization is accelerating by individual innovation. A growing number of freewheeling religious writers and coaches are vying for attention. Moreover, every individual who imagines receiving a calling can, in principle, start a new religious undertaking. A modicum of personal charisma and endurance capabilities is all that is needed. And every individual who joins a new undertaking does it on his/her own terms and with his/her personal agenda in mind, thereby contributing to the innovation. Indeed, many religious entrepreneurs have a prior history of joining and leaving.

From a seemingly 'steady state' quality prior to 1960 – only to be questioned in times of upheaval – the religious field has evolved into a turbulent field. Increasing pluralization means also increasing competition between and higher volatility of churches, sects, movements, and individual entrepreneurs. Permanent innovation results in obsolescence of old forms and habits, but also in the rediscovery of forgotten traditions, indeed, in innovating from traditions.⁴ Religions have lost much of their seemingly perennial aura and are now looked upon as equally precarious as all other mundane phenomena. Last but not least, the religious field and religions seem to be dissolving.

⁴ William Arfman, "Innovating from Traditions: The Emergence of a Ritual Field of Collective Commemoration in the Netherlands," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, 1 (2014), pp. 17-32.

Dissolving Religion(s)

The dissolution is at work on two levels. Religions are dissolving, becoming less identifiable and, hence, the former clear structuring of the religious field into distinct religions is receding. Second, the religious field as a whole is in the process of being included into a wider field of well-being, happiness, and consumption.

Dissolving Religions. In the past, the alliance of the elites of universalistic religions with the political elites in agrarian empires had boosted these religions institutionally and geographically. With the coming of modernity, these religions became even more organized. They were differentiated from their societal surroundings, above all from politics, and became more distinct from one another. At the same time, they became part of a worldwide religious field. Thus, they increasingly came to be regarded first in the West, beginning after 1500, then after 1800 in the rest of the world, as ‘religions’ and as distinct religions.⁵

This centuries-long trend towards better and more distinct institutionalization is pushed into reverse since the 1960s. A process of de-institutionalization and de-differentiation is taking place. The religions with the strongest organizations – the main churches – are generally in decline. Many of the newer ones, like the ‘new religious movements’ and, obviously, individual religious entrepreneurs, refrain from heavy institutionalization. A case in point is the major restructuring going on within Protestantism. The ever-growing number of Protestant churches, in particular the rise of small groups mostly in the Evangelical and Pentecostal realm, and of non-denominational congregations, makes it less clear which beliefs and practices are hidden beneath the label of Protestantism. In another way, this dissolving tendency is also at work within Western Buddhism. It is constituted by organizations and groups with widely different contents and practices, many of which are only faintly referring to Buddhist traditions. Not all denominations and religions are equally prone to dissolution as the examples given. Nevertheless, if this trend continues, the overall outcome in the future could well be a dissolution of the former religions into a religious ‘mouvance’ with few clearing posts.

Dissolving Religion. Occurring simultaneously with the first tendency is an even greater rupture with the past: the dissolution of the religious field into a wider field of well-being, happiness, and consumption. Of course, the borders between the religious sphere and other spheres of life have

⁵ Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (London-New York: Routledge, 2006).

never been sharp. Thanks to improving institutionalization and increasing differentiation, those borders became in modernity somewhat more pronounced. However, this trend is being reversed after 1960.

- Institutions function as markers of a sphere in society (e.g., elections, political parties, and parliament for the polity, companies, and markets for the economy). When institutions fade, the identity of the sphere or subsystem in question equally fades. The weakening of religious institutions, especially of the main churches, thus makes for a more diffuse identity of religion as a distinct field.

- The identification of a distinctive religious field – religion – is further weakened by the normative uplifting of individual religious beliefs and practices. They are now seen as primary above the institutional level. Yet, the individual life-world is never as clearly divided between distinctive provinces as is the world of institutions.

- Whereas previously religions were performing or helping to perform a lot of roles and functions in other spheres of life – e.g., the Catholic Church supporting a Catholic political party or trade union – this is less the case today. Instead, other spheres of life are now performing religious or quasi-religious functions (e.g., psychological coaching of life, art as religion, philosophers promoting ‘the art of living’ or ‘school for life’).⁶ It is more than a coincidence that wellness farms are adorned with artifacts reminiscent of Eastern religions. These ‘ingressions’ weaken the position and recognizability of religion, interpreted as the quest for high transcendence.⁷ While the number of individuals who (say they) adhere to religions is declining, the ‘non-religious’ field offering ‘(quasi-)religious’ performances is growing. In fact, using here ‘religion/religious’ as labels – or, for that matter, ‘spirituality/spiritual’ – becomes in itself problematical.

CHURCH GROWTH AND DECLINE

As a consequence of the new context, organized religion, in particular the main churches, slid into a more precarious position after 1960. The decline side was taken up, above all, by secularization theory. Yet, at the same time, opportunities for reaching out beyond the time-honored fold opened up as well. So-called ‘alternative religiosity’ and ‘new religious movements’ appeared on the scene – since many of them are non-Christian and since they are only loosely structured, I will leave them aside. A number of Christian churches and sects managed to grow as well.

⁶ For more information on ‘the School of Life’, which was founded by Alain de Botton in 2008, see <http://www.theschooloflife.com>.

⁷ Thomas Luckmann, “Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?” *Sociological Analysis* 50, 2 (1990), pp. 127-138.

Moreover, from the 1980s onwards, megachurches made a spectacular entry. Hence, church growth became a topic as well. In Europe, for a long time, secularization and church decline seemed to be all that mattered. In the United States, from the beginning, church growth was looked upon as a possibility, especially in evangelical circles. The debates here about the factors promoting church growth triggered, in turn, a discussion about the factors causing church decline. While secularization theory focuses solely on decline and aims at a general explanation of the decline of organized religion in modernity, the discussion about church growth and decline relates more to the specific factors spurring growth or causing decline in particular churches and congregations. Since the 1960s, church growth and decline has become a huge field of debate and research in the United States, with scores of proposals and ideas going, as one can imagine, in many directions. What is most striking, however, is the almost complete absence in the discussion of the continental European churches and of the Catholic Church – at least, until recently.

The Evangelical Church Growth Movement

After trying for several decades to foster missions in India, the missiologist Donald McGavran (1897-1990) returned in the 1960s to the United States to “save souls” there. To that end, he founded the Church Growth Institute, which after a few years came to be housed at Fuller Theological Seminary. It became the training ground for thousands of missionaries and church planters and the breeding place for a plethora of authors. Thus was started what came to be known as the ‘church growth movement’. The approach of the movement is practical, methodical, managerial, marketing. They stimulate prospective church builders to look at the factors generating and at the barriers preventing church growth and, above all, to look for practical solutions attuned to the particular case. They thus provide pastors and church planters with guidelines and illustrative examples of how to found and multiply congregations. For example, since experience shows that the first members of movements are mainly family or friends of the founder, they advise deliberate harvesting on social networks. Or, because people look for religion in order to master their personal life, they recommend the church builder to tailor his/her message to the felt needs of the targeted people (‘the homogeneous unit principle’). In this manner, they combine

a conservative, strict theology with an activist and open-minded organizational strategy.⁸

The ‘church growth movement’, understood in the strict sense as constituted by McGavran and his followers, fell in the United States on fertile ground. The cultural revolution of the 1960s appalled conservative Christians while the conservative revival from the mid-1970s onwards gave them a boost. There were also plenty of opportunities since the religious market – people leaving, switching, or (re)joining a church – came into full swing after 1960. So the movement quickly proliferated and, inevitably, diversified into an array of different approaches. New, related movements took off and many authors joined in. They constitute what can be called the ‘church growth movement’ in a large sense. In the 1990s, a ‘church health’ movement criticized the almost obsessive focus by McGavran on numbers. They stressed instead quality criteria, such as the deepening of the relationship with Christ (‘discipleship’). The best known advocate is Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, a megachurch in California, and author of “The Purpose Driven Church” (1995). After 2000, a so-called ‘missional church’ model was proposed by Tim Keller and Ed Stetzer. Instead of attracting people to a church, Christians – every Christian, not only professional missionaries or pastors – should take the gospel outside the church. Yet more than collective movements, the church growth movement is fuelled by scores of successful church leaders and authors who all vent their strategies for church growth.⁹

What to make of it?

- It is a missionary movement, fully in line with our time, passionately optimistic and activist. The proponents are, in a typical American way, entrepreneurs with a frontier spirit, believing that they can, almost from scratch but with God’s help, build up new churches that can change the world. Hence, great emphasis is laid upon the pastor as the leader of the congregation – and many seminaries for teaching and training pastors are organized.

- Although theologically conservative, they are very innovative in the institutional realm. They launched or took up a number of concepts and ideas about church work that are buzzing around nowadays in many

⁸ For a short overview of the movement, see: Kenneth W. Inskeep, “A Short History of Church Growth Research,” *Church & Denominational Growth. What does (and does not) cause growth or decline* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), pp. 135-148.

⁹ In addition to the names mentioned, see a.o., Peter Wagner, George Hunter, Bill Hybels, Lyle Schaller, George Barna.

circles, for example ‘church planting’, ‘cell church’ and ‘house church’, ‘seeker-sensitive church’, ‘purpose-driven church’, ‘multisite churches’.

- Standing in the traditions of the free churches, their conception of and guidelines for church growth are fully oriented towards the congregational level, neglecting the higher echelons of denomination or church.

- These are practical people. Their books read like management books, focused on the religion industry.

Research on Church Growth and Decline in the Mainline Churches

After the start by the church practitioners of the ‘church growth movement’, social scientists with links to the mainline churches in the US – Catholic and Protestant – joined the discussion in the 1970s. They took a more analytical stance and were not only interested in church growth, but also in church decline, not surprisingly given the decline of most mainline churches at the time. Most important here are Dean Hoge and David Roozen. Together, they edited in 1979 the highly influential book “Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-1978.” David Roozen, now with Kirk Hadaway, edited in 1993 another influential book, “Church & Denominational Growth.”

Against the activist overtones in the church growth movement and in the ‘strict church’-theory (cf. *infra*), they made a useful distinction between contextual factors, which are beyond the reach of churches, and institutional factors, which can be manipulated by the churches. They demonstrated the crucial importance of contextual factors, like birth rates, population growth, and value change. According to them, it is, in particular, the low and declining birthrate of the white and highly educated constitution of the US mainline churches that explains the decline of these denominations. Nonetheless, they agree with the church growth movement that decline is not only the inexorable result of fate. Institutional factors like denominational tradition, distribution of resources and, above all, rate of commitment and evangelistic effort are crucial in making and keeping congregations vibrant. Furthermore, they demonstrated that there are, even in declining denominations, a number of congregations that grow, with the stated hope that these can show the way for re-launching growth in the non-growing congregations of the denomination. In a sense, then, one can say that Hoge, Roozen, Hadaway, and the like uploaded the church growth issue scientifically into a subject of academic research and, in doing so, they translated and amended ideas of the church growth movement for use in mainline religions.

The debate about church growth and decline in the US is slowly beginning to trickle down to Europe, for example, marginally in the

Netherlands¹⁰ and in Germany and Switzerland,¹¹ and more prominently in the Church of England through its Evangelical wing and through its links with its sister church, the Episcopal Church in the US. Initiatives were already taken in the 1990s and again after 2000.¹² From 2011 to 2013, in a collaborative effort of academic social scientists and church professionals, a large-scale ‘church growth research programme’ was conducted, the results of which are now becoming published.¹³ As the American mainline denominations, the Church of England, although on the whole declining, presents in the decade up to 2010 also congregations that grow – 16% of the congregations, mostly new and (sub)-urban ones – as against 67% that remained more or less stable and 16% declining.¹⁴ In their statistical trend report, the researchers Voas and Watts advise, in the first place, to try to retain children of parent members as being critical for church growth because it is a large group and because they are within easier reach than the non-churched.¹⁵ They also conclude that “active and able lay involvement is crucial”¹⁶ – there are simply not enough professionals. The growth research program, moreover, singles out for growth, in addition to existing congregations and new church plants – the usual suspects for church growth – so-called ‘fresh expressions’ (the Anglican label for experimental initiatives of all sorts) and cathedrals and old churches as special locations. In the UK at least, there seems to be a growing interest in church growth.¹⁷

¹⁰ Rein Brouwer et al., *Levend lichaam: Dynamiek van christelijke geloofsgemeenschappen in Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 2007); Alrik Vos and Stefan Paas, “Nieuwe kerkvorming als kwantitatieve groeistrategie,” *Religie & Samenleving* 8, 2 (2013), pp. 265-288.

¹¹ Benjamin Kulcsar, *Der erlebnisorientierte geistliche Lebensstil als Herausforderung für den Gemeindeaufbau in der Postmoderne. Empirische Untersuchung der Auswirkungen der church growth movement auf den Gemeindeaufbau in Deutschland und in der Schweiz*. PhD-thesis. University of South Africa, 2010 (retrieved at 17 April 2014 from http://uir.unsa.qc.za/bitstream/handle/10500/3845/thesis_kulcsar_b.pdf).

¹² See: Church of England, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 1994); Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

¹³ See: <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk>

¹⁴ David Voas and Laura Watt, *Numerical change in church attendance: national, local and individual factors*. The Church Growth Research Programme. Report on Strand 1 and 2, 2014, p. 6 (retrieved at 14 April 2014 from http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/Report_-_Strands_1_2_rev2.pdf).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁷ See recently, e.g., Helen Cameron, *Resourcing Mission: Practical Theology for Changing Churches* (London: SCM Press, 2010); James Sweeney,

The 'Strict Church'-Perspective of the Rational Choice Theory

Let us go back to the discussion in the United States. The theoretically most elaborated approach about the present position and future prospects of churches was presented in the 1980s and 1990s by the rational choice theorists of religion William Sims Bainbridge, Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Lawrence Iannaccone. They draw their inspiration from a thesis that was first forcefully put forward by Dean Kelley in 1972: conservative – 'strict' – denominations outperform liberal, mainline denominations in terms of denominational growth.¹⁸ According to Chaves, conservative churches in the US grew only slightly from the 1970s to the 1990s to retain afterwards a stable share of around 30%. It is thus not a story of exuberant growth. Nevertheless, the more theologically liberal, mainline Protestant churches have been decreasing in the same amount of time by half to about 14% in 2008.¹⁹ So the rational choice theorists asked themselves the question: Why are strict churches strong?²⁰

Their answer is simple and straightforward: there is both more internal commitment and more outreaching evangelization, precisely because these are strict and demanding churches.²¹ Zealous pastors and followers alike put more energy and time in their personal religious life and in their congregation. Uncommitted members who profit without contributing much – the so-called 'free riders' – are pressed to commit or to leave. Moreover, strict churches are also putting heavy emphasis on spreading the faith, on mission, and evangelization. They are, as a consequence, better able to recruit new members. The Mormons²² and

"Catholicism in Britain. A Church in Search of its Way," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 147-176; and, more generally, David Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

¹⁸ Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 81-93, esp. 85-87.

²⁰ See especially: Laurence Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, 5 (1994), pp. 1180-1211.

²¹ Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, 2 (1996), pp. 133-146.

²² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Jehovah's Witnesses²³ are cited as examples. "Effort pays".²⁴ On the question of why people engage so intensely in strict churches, they answer that not only the demands are higher, but the rewards are also higher. Strict churches make stronger promises about what religion can achieve for its members, on earth and after death, and they deliver more services (uplifting church services, more secular services, and more friendship contacts).

According to Stark and his associates, strict churches have won already in the past the religious competition – they grew into the main churches of today. The religious future belongs to the strict churches as well. Main churches are, in their eyes, an end station: because of their latitude no longer growing, they are poised to become smaller. Stark and Finke have applied their general scheme of upstart growth and main church paralysis also to the Catholic Church in the United States. According to them, the Catholic Church evolved in America because of its sect-like qualities, from a marginal religion around 1800 to the largest US church in the 20th century.²⁵ Yet, the liberalization in the 1960s and 1970s, in combination with the social and cultural assimilation of the Catholics to mainstream white American culture, plunged the American Catholic Church into crisis and decline, an escape from which is not possible "unless the church is able to re-establish greater tension with its environment".²⁶ Finke and Stark do welcome the efforts by John Paul II, but since the majority of Catholics prefer lower-tension faith, they don't expect a full-scale return to high-tension religion.²⁷ Hence, their implicit conclusion is that the Catholic dynamics of earlier times will not return.²⁸

What to make of this theory and of their policy advice?

- Let me begin with a positive appreciation. As said, the religious field after 1960 acquired all the characteristics of a turbulent and highly innovative market. The rational choice theorists give an account for the growing part that small sects and strict movements have come to occupy in this field. They show a keen sense of the dynamic nature of that religious field – they are looking for "winners and losers in our religious

²³ Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12, 2 (1997), pp. 133-157.

²⁴ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 257.

²⁵ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990*, pp. 109-144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-275.

²⁸ A similar analysis of Dutch Catholicism is offered by Erik Sengers, "'Although We are Catholic, We are Dutch'. The Transition of the Dutch Catholic Church from Sect to Church as an Explanation for its Growth and Decline," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, 1 (2004), pp. 129-139.

economy”.²⁹ They highlight the choice character of contemporary religion.

- Sectarian growth, however, is a self-limiting phenomenon: only a limited number of people want so deeply a commitment. The proportion of those deeply involved varies, of course, according to circumstances. Yet it never even approaches half of the population. It is particularly small in the well-educated, existentially secure parts of the population. The prospects for sects in advanced modern societies look good, but remain limited. Maintaining high tension with society and deterring free riders is a costly business.

- The rational choice theorists are at their best when they are analyzing the growth of successful sects. However, I have not seen, so far, an analysis of the turning around of a major church in disarray into a growing sect. Finke and Stark themselves acknowledge the difficulty when they concede, in discussing the options for the Catholic Church, that even popes intent on tightening the strictures, like John Paul II, have to take the reticence of the great majority of Catholics into account. Indeed, in the past decades, Rome has tried to tighten the grip and the rules, yet without resulting in new enthusiasm, let alone a revival. The election of Pope Francis in 2013 can be seen as the recognition of this fact. In my opinion, a reversal from church to sect is not a promising policy option for big old churches like the Catholic Church. It would, instead, enshrine the downward spiral that we have been witnessing since the 1960s.

The ‘Emerging Church Movement’ and the ‘Liquid Church’ Approach

Rising around 2000 in the United States, the ‘emerging church movement’ is the latest outpouring of the church growth movement in the large sense. Its defining characteristics are a postmodern skepticism towards religious doctrine, a drive towards new and more informal styles of communion – ‘beyond church’ as a formal organization – and stress on inculturation and contextuality.³⁰ The ‘emergent church movement’ is essentially driven by a sense of discomfort and even protest against the style and organization of the evangelical establishment. It typically views society as fragmented and splintered and the reality of Christianity as ‘post-Christendom’.³¹ It

²⁹ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990*.

³⁰ James Bielo, “The ‘Emerging Church’ in America: Notes on the interaction of Christianities,” *Religion* 39, 3 (2009), pp. 219-232; *Ibid.*, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011); Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church. Understanding Emerging Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³¹ Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (London: Paternoster Press, 2005).

wants Christianity to be open, inclusive, and diverse. Christians should be concerned with the kingdom of God and not with church growth or conversion to a church: “Jesus was not a church planter,” said an interviewee.³² There is thus an abhorring of formal organization and a proclivity towards experimenting with new forms. It pushes the ‘emergentists’ towards the margins and even outside the churches. Some of the forms of being church that they advocate overlap with those promoted by the church growth movement – like ‘cell churches’, ‘house churches’, ‘network churches’ and ‘multisite churches’. Yet they are also expecting much from new forms like ‘café churches’ and ‘pub churches’, ‘center-set churches’, ‘multi-sensory’ worship or prayer, ‘internet churches’, and ‘social networking churches’.

In many ways akin to the emerging church movement is the ‘liquid church’ approach that has been introduced by the Anglican practical theologian Pete Ward³³ and joined by, among others, Kees de Groot³⁴ in the Netherlands. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Zygmunt Baumann, these authors urge for a liquid church in a time of liquid modernity. As the solid institutions of solid modernity are everywhere on the wane and as they are replaced by lighter forms of organizations and institutions, so will small, light, and informal social forms also in the religious domain replace the older, more solid ones. The theological outlook is liberal. The focus is not on strictness and doctrine, but on the experience of the individual persons and on the ways to awake and enhance it – largely through informal gatherings and through events. The church is constituted not so much by institutional armory as by persons who are celebrating and living Christ in all its different forms. The corresponding organizational form of the church in these liquid times is a network church with fuzzy edges, ensuring a liquid flow of activities and relationships.

Again the question: What to make of it?

- The ambiance of the emerging church movement is an anti-establishment one. It is a cultural critique of self-indulgent, conservative religious America. As such, it expresses the contemporary crisis of the religious right; hence its plea for ‘deconversion’ (meaning the rejection of belonging in favor of authentic Christian experience), for a ‘deconstructed church’, for ‘generous orthodoxy’, ‘post-Christendom’, the renouncing of power and glory, and for an informal and egalitarian style of worship.

³² Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, p. 37.

³³ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002. Edition 2013).

³⁴ Kees de Groot, “The Church in Liquid Modernity: A Sociological and Theological Exploration of a Liquid Church,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, 1 (2006), pp. 91-103.

- The 'emerging church movement' and the 'liquid church' approach are both fond of events. A successful event, in whatever form and in whatever place, enabling the participant to really connect to God is far more important than weekly consumption of dull or magnificent church services. There is a link here with the highly academic 'weak theology' and 'event theology'.³⁵

- Being in favor of informal settings, they have not much to say about the set-up or reform of complex, multi-level churches like the Catholic Church. They expect that in post-Christendom, Christian groupings will be small and loose.

Concluding Observations

For the most part, church growth and decline is a new area of activities and research, emerging after 1960 in the new context of pluralism and competition. It expresses the society-wide ethos that almost everything in our time is changeable, even in the religious field, that sector in which, until recently, God, tradition, and established elites seemed to rule forever. It is no coincidence that the ideas and the movement originated in the United States and, specifically, in the most entrepreneurial circles of Christianity, i.e., the Evangelicals. As I remarked earlier, the absence in the debate of the Catholic Church as a whole and of the continental European Lutheran and Orthodox churches is striking. I cannot believe that this absence is solely due to my inappropriate compiling of the overview. Sticking to a monopolist view, the Catholic Church mentally still has to turn the corner.

To this very day, the Evangelicals and the Calvinist and Baptist churches in the US are framing the debate about church growth and decline. Their terminology is leading: 'church planting', 'discipleship', 'kingdom', etc. Their perspective on church and church growth – as the planting and multiplying of self-governing congregations – is presented as self-evident and is taking over even in the critical 'emerging church movement', the 'liquid church'-perspective or the Church Growth Research Programme of the Church of England. There is no perspective developed on church growth and renewal beyond the grassroots level of the congregation or the event.

In the mainline churches in the US that embarked on church growth strategies, one is aware that each church tradition needs its own peculiar approach. For instance, in assessing its New Church Development Program, the Episcopal Church of the US concluded that the techniques and strategies that are directly emulated from the church growth

³⁵ John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

movement don't work in the Episcopal Church, owing to the fact that it is standing in the Anglican tradition and constituted by a highly educated membership.³⁶ The relevance of ecclesial tradition and reality for envisioning the issue of church growth and decline is also true for the Catholic Church. As I voiced already, it would be disastrous for the Catholic Church to follow a policy designed for small sects and religious movements.

It is a fact, ascertained by many researchers working from divergent perspectives³⁷ that outreaching and missionary effort is the major institutional factor explaining church growth. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that organized religion on the whole has been, numerically speaking, declining for decades in Europe and in the last twenty years also in the United States.³⁸ As the Church Growth Research Programme of the Church of England is reiterating again and again, church growth policy is no panacea for undoing the precarious position of organized religion in advanced modernity.

At the start of the discussion in the 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis was laid on numerical church growth. Soon, however, qualitative goals – the depth of faith, social aims, a church not being a self-serving entity – were added. In the 'emerging church movement', all is focused on the quality of the relationship and encounter. There is thus a shift away from numbers and from ecclesio-centrism. It is good to keep this in mind when discussing change and renewal in the Catholic Church.

There are few elaborated theories in the field of church growth and decline. The rational choice theorists and the group around Hoge, Roozen and Hadaway are the most interesting ones. Particularly absent are theories of major, multi-level churches like the Catholic Church.

³⁶ C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, *New Church Development. A Research Report* (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 2001), p. 36 (retrieved at 28 June 2014 from <http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ncdreport2-pdf>).

³⁷ See e.g., Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990*; David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway (eds.), *Church & Denominational Growth. What does (and does not) cause growth or decline* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

³⁸ David A. Roozen, *A Decade of Change in American Congregations, 2000-2010* (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2011), pp. 14-16 (retrieved at 14 April 2014 from http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faith-communitiestoday.org/files/DecadeofChangeFinal_0.pdf); Chaves, *American Religion*, pp. 45-54.

THE POTENTIAL APPEAL OF A NEW CATHOLIC CHURCH

In the new context of people who have been turned into seekers and of an innovative and turbulent field with many religious and para-religious competitors, the Catholic Church will have to learn to attract people and to convince them that they can find God and lead a more fulfilled life by linking themselves, in one way or another, to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has thus become willy-nilly one player among others in the arena of church growth and decline. The preceding section has discussed the issue of congregational growth – usually described in Catholic language as parish revitalization. In this section, I also want to look at some other church dimensions that might predispose the Catholic Church to attract seekers. But, first of all, I want to make clear that the old type of Catholicism is irrevocably gone and that dreams of upholding or regaining the pre-1960 *societas perfecta* are illusory. In advanced modernity, a new type of Catholic Church and Catholicism is taking shape.

A New Catholicism Emerging

It would be wrong to consider the new context of advanced modernity as only a series of external threats – coming from both the individualized individuals and a turbulent religious and, increasingly, non-religious field – to which the Catholic Church fell victim. Like all agents in society, the Catholic Church is continually processing its environment in an active way. The processing by Catholics and the Catholic Church of the fundamental changes after 1960 thus results in newly formed activities, understandings, relations, and structures. The changes are so numerous and so vast that one can say that a new type of Catholicism, ‘choice Catholicism’, is emerging, substituting ‘ultramontane mass Catholicism’, the previous church formation in place from the 19th to the middle of the 20th centuries.³⁹

- In the Catholic countries, the Catholic Church enjoyed a monopoly status. Its self-image stressed even more the tradition and the divine right of being the one, true church. As a result of secularization and/or upcoming rivals, the Catholic Church is evolving towards a minority church in all countries. The self-image is changing accordingly: the conservatives are advocating a defiant counterculture, while the liberals are arguing for, among other things, ‘weak theology’ and a kenotic church (for the latter, see Bucher in this volume).

³⁹ Staf Hellemans, “Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West,” *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, pp. 19-50.

- The formidable, closed Catholic sub-societies, which were set up in the 19th century and early 20th centuries and which consisted of a plethora of organizations constituting a parallel Catholic world, have largely disappeared. Catholic schools, hospitals, and the like are among the heritage that is still important. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church is nowadays left predominantly with only religious means to attract believers. The Catholic milieu is now, in the first place, composed of religious associations and informal groups.

- The priests, being at the time the leaders of the Catholic world and superior to their 'flock' in terms of education and social status, have lost their ruling capacity and their superior status. Catholic priests are now few and, in the eyes of the Catholics, are no longer upheld as bearers of power, intellect, culture, and advice. They are sought mainly for their sacramental performances.

- The world of religious orders and congregations, once regarded as 'the second pillar of Christianity' (next to the diocesan clergy), is imploding and is, but only in small part, replaced by lay movements of Catholics and 'new ecclesial movements'.

- The institutional set-up of the Catholic Church is changing as well. Parishes, which for ages were the bedrock of Catholicism, are generally in trouble. Their fortune is uncertain. The diocesan level, on the other hand, is deploying more and more activities. On a global level, the Western, Romanist church has evolved into a multicultural world church.

- The turn after 1960 towards a culture of expressive individualism is resounding within Catholicism in the turn away from the ideals of asceticism and doctrinal obedience towards forms of experiential religion and wisdom theology (for the last, see Jonkers in this volume). Examples are highly visible, large-scale events (cf. the World Youth Days or papal visits) and spiritual authors, past and present, held in high esteem. The partial 'return' of rituals, processions, and candle lighting fits this trend as well.

The preceding sketch of the transition towards choice Catholicism is emphasizing more what has gone than what is coming. This is no surprise. The dismantling of ultramontane mass Catholicism may be advanced. What the settled form of the new Catholicism will eventually look like is still shrouded in clouds because it is still in the making.

Parish and Grassroots Revitalization.

The great strength of Christianity since the early Middle Ages and of Catholicism since the Reformation is the tightly woven network of well-elaborated local parishes. In the time of ultramontane mass Catholicism, they were busy centers of activities and considered to be the home for the

Catholics living within their territorial confines.⁴⁰ They are in great trouble now with no remedies in sight.⁴¹

Without pretending to have the solutions at hand, we can ask: What can be learned from the work and literature on church growth and decline that we reviewed in the preceding section and that focuses on the local level?

- Church growth is possible, at least for a number of parishes and local initiatives. Nevertheless, church growth initiatives in most cases do not add up to large-scale church growth. The social context after 1960 disfavors universal church involvement. The distinction between contextual and institutional factors is useful here. One cannot change the context as such – the seeking imperative,⁴² the competitive field, the demographic situation – but one can take it up institutionally. Churches that focus on church growth are declining less.

- Church growth or, more realistically, church stabilization, does not come without effort. Growing denominations are putting much energy into church planting, church renewal, and appealing to people. They are recruiting church planters, organizing seminars to train them, providing finances and other resources. These churches, moreover, highly value church growth and church planters as essential for their being church and Christians. In short, church growth or stabilization happens only if there is a ‘church growth culture’ and an accompanying ‘church growth infrastructure’ (research and training centers, organizational and financial support from the decision making centers of the church).

- Church growth needs entrepreneurial individuals. The entrepreneurs planting new congregations in the US are mostly between 25 and 45 years old, with a peak between 35 and 39, i.e., young people, but not the youngest – some basic experience is important.⁴³ Their first job is to find lay volunteers on the spot to help them set up the (re)new(ed)

⁴⁰ Yves Lambert, *Dieu change en Bretagne. La religion à Limerzel de 1900 à nos jours* (Paris: Cerf, 1985); Wilhelm Damberg and Andreas Henkelmann, “Von der Pfarrei zur Gemeinde? Entwicklungslinien lokaler Vergemeinschaftung im 20. Jahrhundert aus theologie- und kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive,” *Gemeinde unter Druck – Suchbewegungen im weltkirchlichen Vergleich: Deutschland und die USA* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2012), pp. 49–81.

⁴¹ See, however, Michael N. Ebertz, *Aufbruch in der Kirche. Anstöße für ein zukunftsfähiges Christentum* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2003).

⁴² To paraphrase Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1979).

⁴³ Hadaway and Marler, *New Church Development*, p. 13; C. Kirk Hadaway, *Facts on Growth 2010* (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2011), p. 19 (retrieved at 14 April 2014 from <http://faithcommunities-today.org/sites/faithcommunities-today.org/files/FACTsonGrowth2010.pdf>).

initiative. Consequently, new church founders are few and not easy to recruit. Church growth work is demanding, exhausting, and often disappointing. The threshold can be lowered, though, by aiming at the organization of temporary events or smaller initiatives (like family meetings, city groups, café churches). Recruitment is not restricted to the few church professionals. On the contrary, all people from all walks of life are called. Involvement of non-professionals – the laity – is crucial.

- Church growth follows a logic of opportunity wherever it arises rather than a territorial logic of dividing up a territory in neatly circumscribed congregations or parishes. It is a logic of choice, leading the initiators in choosing a location and approach as well as the ‘respondents’ often willing to come from afar. Consequently, the horizontal network of analogous congregations is making way for a conglomerate of diverging initiatives – local, supra-local, generational, virtual, in churches, homes, and pubs, and so on.

- Church growth initiatives are inevitably struggling with the paradox that they are doing institutional work – church building – yet that their ultimate goal, encountering God’s presence, lies beyond the institution. The ‘church health movement’, the ‘liquid church’ approach, and the ‘emerging church movement’ are all three reactions to too great a stress on numerical and institutional growth. There is no escape from this paradox, as is well known in ecclesiology, and also in Catholic ecclesiology.⁴⁴

Looking from this vantage point at the Catholic Church, and more particularly at the contemporary initiatives at parish revitalization, one tends to become pessimistic. At the moment, the Catholic Church is not ready to embark on parish revitalization and, more generally, on the promotion of a diversity of grassroots initiatives, let alone on church growth.

- Parish revitalization was a hot issue in the 1960s when liturgical renewal and, more generally, the implementation of the new church vision of Vatican II were launched. The initial enthusiasm cooled down quickly. Nowadays, in many European countries, parish revitalization has become a euphemism for the fusion of local parishes into super-parishes out of financial necessity and due to the lack of priests.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See e.g., Henk Witte, “‘Ecclesia, quid dicis de teipsa?’ Can Ecclesiology Be of Any Help to the Church to Deal with Advanced Modernity?” *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, pp. 121-145.

⁴⁵ See the special issue by the journal *Lumen Vitae*: Lumen Vitae (eds.), “Les regroupements paroissiaux: bilan et perspectives,” *Lumen Vitae* 67, 1 (2012).

- Parish restructuring is generally executed in a top-down and bureaucratic way. The process mirrors the hierarchical and clerical organization of the Catholic Church, expressed both in the concentration of decision-making and in the passive attitude of most Catholics. Although participation from local parish volunteers is sought in most dioceses, for example, in Belgium and France, the overall direction is firmly in the hands of the diocesan level. In a downsizing operation, this is perhaps inevitable. Yet, the risks of large-scale disappointment among the rank and file are great and the willingness to move to a new parish center low. The actual practice of parish restructuring is reinforcing the downward trend in the Catholic Church.

- Hence, the future of parishes doesn't look good. They will not disappear soon, yet their scope is decreasing and is now mainly consisting of offering Sunday celebrations and the 'rites de passage' and their preparation. Though important, it will not cause much inside fervor nor outside attraction. There are, nonetheless, also active and resounding parishes, sometimes attached to old churches and cathedrals provided with enough money and resources, in many cases thanks to local initiatives and/or the charisma of the local parish priest. These parishes, a limited number, are acting more and more as regional church centers.

- Many men and women are therefore looking outside their territorial parish. In Germany, pastoral initiatives geared at particular social milieus (youth, elderly, students, high culture fans, post-materialists, etc.) – what is called 'milieusensible Kirche'⁴⁶ – are being set up by parishes as well as by dioceses and Catholic organizations. In many parts of Europe, dioceses are taking over more and more tasks that were formerly performed at the parish level, with youth work again at the front.⁴⁷ Above all, numerous initiatives are taken from outside the channels of the established church, in spiritual centers, in old Catholic organizations, and in new associations, in new ecclesial movements. As in US Protestantism, a similar shift from a tight network of parishes towards a conglomerate of diverging grassroots initiatives, following a logic of opportunity, can be observed in Catholicism.

- The promotion of an encompassing 'church growth culture' and the accompanying 'church growth infrastructure' is lacking in the Catholic Church. Though the need for evangelization – the Catholic label for mission and church growth – has become more stressed in the last

⁴⁶ Michael N. Ebertz and Hans G. Hunstig (eds.), *Hinaus ins Weite. Gehversuche einer milieusensiblen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

⁴⁷ Wilhelm Damberg and Staf Hellemans (eds.), *Die neue Mitte der Kirche. Der Aufstieg der intermediären Instanzen in den europäischen Großkirchen seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2010).

decades,⁴⁸ in the eyes of the church hierarchy it shouldn't disturb the clerical and hierarchical order of the Church. It is true that from the days of the Early Church until the time of ultramontane mass Catholicism, mission and church growth were, in the first place, performed by priests and nuns. With time, it became also more dependent on approval by the hierarchy. This legacy and the fear for an unruly laity are still guiding the policy of the church hierarchy, clearly so in the area of parish restructuring. The handling of parish restructuring in the diocese of Poitiers and the encouragement of local initiatives by the laity as a necessary complement of parish fusions is often hailed by theologians, yet poorly imitated in the Church.⁴⁹ So long as the attitude persists that clerics and religious have to do the job and that nothing may escape hierarchical control, a dynamic church growth culture addressing all will fail to develop and, consequently, church growth or stabilization will continue to be a faraway dream.

The Surplus of a Multi-Level Church: Addressing All.

The first modernity, comprising the years between about 1800 and 1960, saw the emergence and triumph of mass organizations as quintessential actors in society. The era after 1880 has thus been termed as "organized capitalism". After 1960, however, mass membership began to fade. This is true for the major political parties and trade unions, for the older cultural mass organizations, and, in a different vein, also for big enterprises and banks. The Catholic Church follows this trend as well. The policy of institutional uploading and the persistent endeavor to turn all Catholics into loyal members of a stringently hierarchical church institution 'from cradle to grave', was no longer successful after 1960. As in the non-religious organizations, there was both a drop in membership and a loosening of the membership ties. The new context of choice implied also a power reversal from clergy to seeker. The power reversal forces the Church into the position of suppliant: it has to beg for attention. The Church can no longer enforce its dogmas or norms. Instead, it has to convince, to attract, to appeal. The reconversion from an institution accustomed to deference of loyal members and the use of hard power, if need be, to one with only soft, appealing power constitutes for the Catholic Church in our time its greatest challenge. It entails two facets:

⁴⁸ Jozef Wissink, "Mission and Modernity. Reflections on the Mission of the Church in Advanced-Modern Society," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, pp. 257-274.

⁴⁹ Nicolas de Brémond d'Ars, *Catholicisme, zones de fracture. Que devient le catholicisme en France?* (Paris: Bayard, 2010), pp. 47-67.

addressing the public at large and presenting a fitting religious offer for those potentially and really interested.

Concerning the first facet, relating to the public beyond the decreasing numbers of members – yet including the members – let me turn again to political parties. The fading of large numbers of members didn't imply the fading of political parties. Yet it altered the parties' relations with the remaining members and with the public. Political parties, like the churches, are nowadays less entrenched in political subcultures. It allows the top party level to appeal directly via the modern mass media to voters – without having to go via local barons and members as intermediaries. In good times, they can attract voters beyond their customary voter constituency. In bad times, they lose voters, even core voters, to other parties. There is more to win, yet also more to lose. There is thus, on the whole, more instability. Although fewer elements can be controlled, parties continue, of course, to try to guide and govern the new situation. They do this, generally, in three ways: by choosing appealing leaders, by crafting programs for their constituency and the general public, and by smart party communication and campaigning. I propose to look in a similar way to the Catholic Church – by now a former 'total institution' – and to its altered relation with the public (and the 'members'). Indeed, in the new situation, addressing the public in an appropriate way becomes paramount. In principle, there is now the potential to win everybody, yet also the risk of losing all. We can expect, for sure, more instability and volatility. Yet, at the same time, the Catholic Church, being a highly visible major institution and world player, has plenty of opportunities here.

- *Personnel*. As is clear by the example of Pope Francis who redressed the poor image of the Catholic Church within a year of his election, charismatic and appealing church leaders have become of the utmost importance. One needs, of course, a good combination of different types of leaders – spiritual, doctrinal, charismatic, managerial, etc. Yet, a continuing preference, as in the previous decades, for doctrinal stalwarts, no matter the costs, would curb from the outset any possible reception by a large public. Through their high visibility, popes and bishops have become, for good and for ill, exemplars of the Catholic faith.

- *Program*. Observing our life and society 'sub specie aeternitatis', in the light of the eternal and compassionate God, can shed a highly relevant perspective on the world and on our problems and options. The Catholic Church has a tradition of speaking programmatically to the world, through papal and episcopal letters. There is a potential here to

elaborate and to diffuse a ‘Catholic program for advanced modernity’ to the general public.⁵⁰

- *Communication.* Before 1960, most people got their information about the Catholic Church through acquaintance of local parish priests and through Catholic media. Since then, parish participation has declined and church information is now mostly tapped from non-denominational media. It is striking how many people still have an outdated image of the church (Latin masses, omnipotent priests who delve into the intimate lives of their parishioners, etc). There is thus a lot to do. In particular, the Church needs to communicate more systematically what it is offering, most of which is hardly known. Yet, an effective communication policy also means more openness on internal matters and dealing properly with scandals.

The public presence and visibility of the Church has thus becomes crucial. Nevertheless, churches are not political parties. They are not content with positive perceptions leading to one-off decisions – votes, church baptism, and burial – but aim, in the first place, at extended commitment by the ‘faithful’. The Catholic Church must, hence, do more than communicate well with the public. The need for grassroots initiatives, including parish revitalization, was already treated in the preceding paragraph. Furthermore, and perhaps above all, the Church needs also to make an offer that is captivating to people who want to engage in religion. Without a relevant offer, no grassroots initiative will take off and no public address will leave a mark.

A Broad and Varied Religious Offer.

As a consequence of the power reversal, every religious institution or group, even a once mighty one like the Catholic Church, now has to bet on the attractiveness of its religious offer. It has to convince people that religion, and more so, its religion, is needed to lead a better, more fulfilled life. Presenting a fitting and convincing religious offer has thus become decisive. In my opinion, the Catholic Church is failing in just this respect. This is the main direct cause of its decline. Between 1800 and 1960, an extensive and widely used offer for the regular faithful was present. Sacraments and sacramentals, daily prayers, fasting, devotional sodalities, dedication to a saint to which one felt particularly connected, the yearly celebration of the great religious feasts as markers of the calendar, the

⁵⁰ Anthony J. Carroll, “A Catholic Program for Advanced Modernity,” *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, pp. 51-77; Charles Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?,” *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 13-37.

wide-ranging field of social and cultural associations, educational opportunities, even the religious decoration of the home were all regarded as being delivered or made possible by the Church. Many of these forms have now disappeared or they have lost appeal to most Catholics. Practicing Catholics nowadays are mostly satisfied with a standard offer comprising the Eucharist and the ‘rites de passage’. That is not enough. So, the biggest challenge for the Catholic Church is to build up a new and diverse religious offer, in line with the Catholic tradition, that is relevant for the individual person to help live his or her life. The elaboration of such a new, fitting religious offer is a huge task. It is, above all, a creative task and one that cannot be promulgated from on high because it has to build upon countless experiments, mostly from below, from which a small number of successful performances can be selected for fine-tuning and wider dissemination. To be fair, there has been widespread innovation, even after the waves of innovation of the 1960s withered away (World Youth Days, new *movimenti*, spirituality centers, etc.), but this has not been enough and what has been created has only elicited limited appeal.

A strong point of a major church like the Catholic Church has always been the inclusion of different types of people and of different degrees of commitment. The Catholic religious offer has thus always been quite variegated. If the Church wants to remain a religion for all people, guaranteeing a broad offer for all will be important. The offer for outsiders and occasional participants – church tourism, candle lighting, rites de passage – is, in comparison to small churches, still impressive. It could be further strengthened by appealing personnel and an outreaching programmatic and communication policy (cf. *supra*). Yet for the regular faithful and for the would-be virtuosi, the religious offer has, in fact, declined and/or is less used than before. In many parishes, Sunday celebrations seem almost all that is left. The elaboration of a new offer, i.e., the creation of new or renewed spiritual and devotional paths that are supportive for living a fulfilled life, for the heavily interested as well as for the lukewarm, for the committed as well as for those with reservations, is thus of critical importance.

Renewing the Catholic Milieu

Christianity before the Reformation era and Catholicism thereafter have always been more than the institutional Christian/Catholic Church. In reaction to the Reformation and to the threats perceived in upcoming liberalism and socialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and as a consequence of the institutional upgrading of the Church, Catholicism and church institution became more identified. In the 19th century, the Catholic Church advanced to become the hierarchical, multi-level institution we know today. But even then, the hierarchical Church and its activities were

seen as only the motor and quintessence of a whole Catholic world with its orders and congregations, its sodalities and religious associations, and, above all, its numerous educational, cultural, and social organizations. This wide-ranging Catholic world collapsed in the West after 1960, with the effect that one is even more tempted today to equate Catholicism with the Catholic Church.

The waning of the Catholic world of ultramontane mass Catholicism constitutes, obviously, a major setback for the Church. The Church was the leader of this world and thus also a leader in the nations where an extended Catholic world had been successfully built up. This has ended. But it doesn't mean that all is done now within the institutional realm of a church which is itself becoming more fragile. On the contrary, not only a new Catholic Church is emerging. A new Catholic milieu related to, yet not identical with, the institutional Catholic Church is arising as well. A number of new monastic communities have been founded. New Catholic religious associations, liberal as well as conservative, in particular the so-called 'new ecclesial movements', have proliferated. The weakening church infrastructure, i.e., the declining number of priests and the scaling up of the parishes into regional pastoral units, are opening up spaces for small-scale lay initiatives, for 'house churches' and 'cell churches', for Bible- and mystics-reading groups, for prayer and spirituality groups, for small faith-based social initiatives, and so on. Sometimes they operate under the guidance of priests; sometimes they insist consciously on their independence. To be sure, in comparison to the Catholic world in ultramontane mass Catholicism, the Catholic milieu is, as the Church, much frailer and more limited in scope and numbers. Yet, it is an important complement to the institutional church. The future of Catholicism will depend as much on the vitality of this new Catholic milieu as on that of the institutional church – and on the invigorating relationship between the two. For a start, distinguishing the Church from its surrounding milieu can help to avoid all-too-easy reductions of milieu to Church.

Avoiding Polarization

From the start of modernity, since the French Revolution, a divide has emerged between conservatism and liberalism. Of course, there are always far more ideas circulating than two grand options. The dual scheme of left and right is a shameless reduction of this diversity. Yet, it is a scheme that works in practice. As soon as a decision, even on a complicated compromise formula, has to be taken, one is forced to vote for or against. Many decisions do not wake up partisan feelings. Yet important and symbolic decisions can relatively easily become connected to grander ideological schemes (cf. the reactions to a number of

encyclicals, Vatican instructions, and condemnations of theologians and theological currents, especially since the late 1960s). Moreover, the divide is inherent to modernity because the ubiquity of change within modernity breeds more clashes over which changes are to be welcomed or even fostered and which are not. More and more decisions have to be made with, possibly, far-reaching changes in mind.

Being part of society and modernity, the religious sphere was, from the beginning, drawn into this divide. Religions not only choose sides – the Catholic Church mostly siding with conservatism – but were, at the same time, internally divided. The new situation after 1960 is also changing the ways in which the religious divide is being fought out. If anything, it has gathered more prominence, and for good reason: changes are speeding up, they are touching more issues, and they look easier to attain. This also affects the Catholic Church. Every pronouncement by the Church is nowadays regarded as a decision that could have been taken otherwise – and it is thus implicitly seen as debatable; hence the rise of publicly visible protests from all sides. It will not abate in the future. What is more, with the fading of total membership, the institutional glue is loosening at the same time. It could further the propensity of schisms – until now almost absent in the Catholic Church – especially on the conservative side because they are emphasizing doctrine and organization more than liberals do.

For the Catholic Church in our time, it would be, I think, self-destructive to envisage its future in terms of a battle between conservatives and liberals that could/should be won by either side. In the past decades, the conservatives were hegemonic in the Catholic Church. The costs are known: retrenchment into a small defensive bulwark against ‘modernity’. However, the conservative option looks attractive to some sections of Catholics: when the world is turning against the Church, one is tempted to turn against the world. The conservative option is not an obsolete option, nor an unlikely one. A liberal hegemony would also face high costs and growing discord: fierce debates and protests and potential schisms on the conservative side. Moreover, adaptation of the Catholic Church to the liberal norms and life-styles of advanced modernity is not enough to become religiously attractive. It is thus unlikely that a straightforward liberalism will fare better than conservatism.

So the question becomes: Is it possible to move beyond sheer conservatism and sheer liberalism? My intuition is that, for the future of the Catholic Church, the development of a relevant religious offer, the positive communication with the public at large, the promotion of Catholic grassroots initiatives, and the enlivenment of a (Catholic) milieu inspired by the Catholic Church will be decisive. Above all, Catholicism should be regarded as being helpful for people to reach out towards the good life. What the public is looking for is an interesting portfolio of

different avenues to live a godly – and thus rewarding – life. They are not seeking a church institution. Of course, the joint undertaking of this sort of religious innovation will not dispel the divide, but it could contain the centrifugal forces. Sociologically speaking, it will be interesting to see whether the meeting ground will be sufficient to move on together and to take hold again. Yet, this will not put an end to the precarious situation the Church and Catholicism are facing. The precarious situation is structural: in advanced modernity, major church religion is far from evident.

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PART II

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER V

FROM RATIONAL DOCTRINE TO CHRISTIAN WISDOM

PETER JONKERS

INTRODUCTION: AN UNWORLDLY CHURCH

In his address in Freiburg of September 25, 2011, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI raised the same question as the one that is the ‘leitmotiv’ of this volume, namely, how the Catholic Church, taking for granted that it has become a minority in Western Europe, can relate to today’s world of seekers in such a way that its message will be heard and followed. In particular, Benedict asks whether the Church, in order to realize this goal, must “not adapt her offices and structures to the present day, in order to reach the searching and doubting people of today.”¹ Fundamentally, it goes without saying that the Church is called to constant change; in other words, it must constantly rededicate itself to its apostolic mission. But for Benedict, this mission does not, by any means, coincide with the Church becoming worldlier and adapting to the actual world. On the contrary, “in order to accomplish her mission, she will need again and again to set herself apart from her surroundings, to become in a certain sense ‘unworldly’.”² Keeping in mind that Benedict gave his address almost half a century after the opening session of the Second Vatican Council, which took as its motto the ‘aggiornamento’, that is, the opening up of the Church to modern society, his bold answer to this question strikes us. With his plea for a detachment of the Church from the world, he clearly expresses his opposition against the accommodation strategies in the aftermath of Vatican II. But does he go so far as to say that the Church should undo again its recent opening up to the world? In order to avoid this and other misunderstandings, let us start with investigating what Benedict exactly intends with his plea for an ‘unworldly’ Church, and then examine how his call relates to the often heard complaint that the Church’s detachment from the modern world has brought about a disjunction with it.

¹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Freiburg im Breisgau, Sunday, September 25, 2011* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011). In the plain text, I refer to the Church with the neutral ‘it’, but when quoting Pope Emeritus Benedict, I adopt his use of the feminine when referring to the Church.

² Ibid.

First of all, it has to be noted that, for Benedict, ‘becoming unworldly’ (in the German original: *Entweltlichung*) is a theological concept. Thus, it has to be understood in line with the word of the Gospel that Christians are indeed *in* but not *of* the world.³ From this perspective, it is no wonder that he criticizes a Church that has become too much ‘of the world’: a worldly “Church becomes self-satisfied, settles down in this world, becomes self-sufficient and adapts herself to the standards of the world.”⁴ Hence, by detaching itself from the world, the Church actually returns to its original vocation of being the salt of the earth. Therefore, paradoxically, Benedict welcomes the secularization process in the sociological or juridical sense of the word as a necessary step in order to untie the traditional knot between Church and society, thereby referring to well-known examples of secularization, such as the expropriation of Church goods or elimination of its privileges.⁵ He qualifies this process not as a loss, but rather as a liberation of the Church from all kinds of problematic forms of worldliness.

But the above-quoted passage from the gospel also says that Christians are *in* the world. So, Benedict’s proposal for the Church’s detachment from the world should not be misunderstood as a plea for a complete withdrawal from it, leading to a fateful separation between the Church and the world. On the contrary, if the Church is liberated from its material and political burdens and privileges, it is far better equipped to fulfill its missionary task: it can reach out more effectively and in a truly Christian way to the whole world, and be truly open to it. To phrase it paradoxically, insofar as it resolutely moves away from its worldliness, that is, from its problematic alliance with the world as it actually is, the Church “open[s] up afresh to the cares of the world, to which she herself belongs, and give herself over to them.”⁶ In sum, characteristic of an unworldly Church is that it is “not bracketing or ignoring anything from the truth of our present situation, but living the faith fully here and now in the utterly sober light of day, appropriating it completely, and stripping

³ John, 17:16. In his address, Benedict refers to this passage; see Benedict XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*. I developed this theme in: Peter Jonkers, “In the world, but not of the world. The prospects of Christianity in the modern world,” *Bijdragen* 61 (2000), pp. 370-389.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

⁵ Ibid. Unfortunately, F.-X. Kaufmann interprets the address of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI primarily in this sociological and juridical way, and thereby fails to see its theological intention. See Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, “Entweltlichte Kirche?” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Gegenwart)*. January 7, 2012, p. 11.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

away from it anything that only seems to belong to faith, but in truth is mere convention or habit.”⁷

According to Benedict, the ‘unworldly’ mission of the Church in this world “is built first of all upon personal experience: ‘You are witnesses’ (*Lk* 24:48); it finds expression in relationships: ‘Make disciples of all nations’ (*Mt* 28:19); and it spreads a universal message: ‘Preach the Gospel to the whole creation’ (*Mk* 16:15).”⁸ These keywords – personal experience, relationships, and universal message – show that Christian faith starts with a personal experience of God, who calls on us to put our lives in the sign of the risen Lord, secondly, that this experience is expressed in and shared with a community of likeminded people, and, finally, that it is preached to the whole world as a message of hope. In other words, faith starts with the lived life, which can only thereafter be reflected upon theoretically (or theologically) and laid down in doctrines. Referring to the title of this paper, Christian faith is not primarily a rational doctrine, but an expression of wisdom.

In a certain sense, Benedict’s plea for an unworldly Church is meant to highlight its kenotic character. According to Waclaw Hryniewicz, the word ‘kenosis’ means self-limitation, self-resignation. It refers to a God, whose liberating love for people is a self-emptying one and does not overpower them, to Jesus, who humiliated himself on the cross and thereby negated all self-centeredness and self-interestedness, and to a vision of the Church that is critical of its ecclesiastical egoisms, self-centeredness, and self-satisfaction, or, phrased positively, a Church that is more friendly to people, closer to the poor, especially to those who have lost hope and meaning in their lives, and open to dialogue with those who do not believe.⁹ Accordingly, Benedict is strongly convinced that Christians should let go of all self-centeredness, and that the Church should distance itself from its ecclesiastical egoisms and self-satisfaction, so that the Church “opens herself to the world not in order to win men for an institution with its own claims to power, but in order to lead them to themselves by leading them to him of whom each person can say with Saint Augustine: he is closer to me than I am to myself.”¹⁰ But, on the other hand, Benedict’s critique of the modern world is so radical that he is often suspected of completely turning his back to it. He despises its moral, cultural, and intellectual relativism and its reductionist positivism, and is convinced that these ills can only be cured by relying on a trans-

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Waclaw Hryniewicz, *The Spirit: The Cry of the World* (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014), p. ix.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

historical idea of truth and goodness.¹¹ By adopting this position he seems to overpower the authentic search for meaning and hope of today's seekers and to overwhelm them with fixed certainties. In the eyes of many, this has led to the disjunction that this volume precisely wants to overcome: many seekers inside and outside the Church think that it does not take their quest for spiritual healing and moral orientation seriously, and, hence, that it is not really interested in a dialogue with them.

Thus, the fundamental question that rises in this respect is whether the Church can be unworldly, i.e., refraining from becoming *of* the world, while being at the same time capable of bridging its disjunction with the world, i.e., to be truly *in* the world? Phrased in this way, Benedict's plea for an unworldly Church seems to be as old as the Christian message itself: Christ himself has reminded his followers that their true destiny does not lay in this world, so they can never feel completely comfortable with the world as it is. But Benedict's critique of the relation between the Church and today's world is more specific and fundamental: he is convinced that, in our times, the Church has become too worldly, so that it is no longer capable of listening and responding to the existential needs of today's seekers. To put it more concretely, in spite of the line that the Church has adopted following the Second Vatican Council, namely, to open itself up to the world, it has not really been able to bridge its disjunction with the world. This observation is substantiated, at least in most Western societies, by the fact that the number of people acknowledging that the true destiny of their lives lies in Christian faith has been decreasing dramatically. Many others are seeking for meaning in rather indiscriminate ways,¹² often unaware of what they are seeking, but in any case rather loath to what the major religious traditions have on offer. But the overall majority does not seek at all, either actively or passively, either inside or outside the Church. Against this background, it is no wonder that Benedict wants to try another approach, and places his bets on a voice that aims to relate to the actual world from a more external position. In other words, he thinks that an 'unworldly' Church is far better able to help seekers find meaning in life and put things in the right perspective than a worldly one. But, in spite of all his good intentions, the question remains whether his fierce opposition to the modern world will

¹¹ Heiko Nüllmann, *Logos Gottes und Logos des Menschen. Der Vernunftbegriff Joseph Ratzingers und seine Implikationen für Glaubensverantwortung, Moralbegründung und interreligiösen Dialog* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2012), pp. 305-312.

¹² The indiscriminate character of this search in contemporary society, which has been substantiated by a lot of sociological research, has brought me to describe it in the introduction to this volume as one of 'longing without belonging'.

not result in a Church that is completely out of touch with it so that, eventually, its voice will not be heard anymore. Such an outcome would not only be counterproductive for the Church, but also, and more importantly, be quite the opposite of the very essence of a kenotic Church, namely, a Church that is truly *in* the world, that opens itself up to the cares of the world, offering it meaning and hope.

In sum, Benedict's plea for an unworldly Church confronts the leading question of this volume of how to overcome the disjunction between the Church and the world of the seekers, with an intriguing paradox: How can the Church remain faithful to its true mission, which is fundamentally an unworldly one, while at the same time opening itself up in a truthful way to the world, that is, keeping in touch with the spiritual needs of people who are seeking meaning and orientation in their lives? It is obvious that this paradox cannot be avoided, and even less be solved, because it belongs to the essence of Christian faith. Instead, I want to shed some light on this paradox by investigating two central ideas from Benedict's address in Freiburg from the perspective of the leading question of this volume.

First, I want to discuss the implications of Benedict's idea that faith has to start from the experience of the lived life, which is then linked to the Christian tradition and shared in a community of faith, and preached to the whole world. I will show that this comes down to an idea of Christian faith as an expression of wisdom, which is able to orientate people towards living the good life and prepare them for the eternal life. Accepting the idea that Christian faith is first of all an expression of wisdom opens a perspective for the Church to bridge its disjunction with today's world by taking to heart the existential quest of the seekers, and responding to it by offering elements of Christian wisdom. Phrased negatively, such an approach means that the Church distances itself from an idea of faith as a set of fixed philosophic-theological certainties.

Second, and in relation with the first point, I want to examine more closely the idea of a kenotic Church, willing to give up its worldly power and privileges and to become more humble. Because such a Church aligns what it teaches and preaches with its own lived life, thereby admitting that Christians have nothing more than their sins to place before God,¹³ it will invite people to live their lives from a Christian perspective rather than overwhelm them with its teachings, encourage them to accept the Kingdom of God as their ultimate destiny rather than impose a set of moral do's and don'ts. Such a Church is able to let its missionary witness shine more brightly and reach out to the whole world, including to non-believers. Moreover, by recognizing the pivotal importance of its kenotic

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

character, the Church will also be able to take a more welcoming attitude towards other religions in the interreligious dialogue.

My aim is to examine these two aspects of an unworldly Church from a philosophical perspective. In particular, I will ask whether these two ideas are indeed capable of overcoming the disjunction between the Church and the world of the seekers in a truthful way. Hence, I will leave the theological implications of these ideas aside, including Benedict's further development of them.¹⁴ In order to clarify the kind of Christian wisdom and kenotic Church I am aiming at, I will start with contrasting them with two important features of Catholic faith during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, namely, ultramontane mass Catholicism and neo-Thomism. Then, I will give a short analysis of the world of today's seekers, focusing on one of its most problematic characteristics, viz., the self-centered character of postmodern individuals and their lack of truthful life-orientations. In the final section, I will examine whether an interpretation of Christian faith in terms of wisdom is able to bridge the disjunction between the Church and the world of the seekers.

ULTRAMONTANE MASS CATHOLICISM AND NEO-THOMISM

Ultramontane Mass Catholicism

The development of the Catholic Church during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century can first of all be characterized as the rise of ultramontane mass Catholicism.¹⁵ Although it originated in France

¹⁴ For an analysis of and critical discussion with Benedict's ideas on the relevance of the Church for contemporary society see Peter Jonkers, "A Purifying Force for Reason. Pope Benedict on the Role of Christianity in Advanced Modernity," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity. Transformations, Visions, Tensions* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012), pp. 79-102; and Peter Jonkers, "A Philosophical Faith. Pope Benedict's Response to Rawls," *Rawls and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), forthcoming.

¹⁵ For the coining of this term and its development see Staf Helleman, "A Critical Transition. From Ultramontane Mass Catholicism to Choice Catholicism," *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), pp. 37-39; Staf Helleman, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity. Transformations, Visions, Tensions*, pp. 21-23. In the first part of this section, I draw extensively from his work on this topic as well as from Wilhelm Damberg, "The Catholic Church and European Catholicism after 1945. Moving Towards Convergence of Diversity and Fragmentation?," *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe*, pp. 18-21.

in the 17th and 18th centuries, this model proved to be especially successful in the Low Countries, leading to the so-called compartmentalized or pillarized society, which combined societal pluralism with a strong homogeneity inside each (religious) compartment. During this period, the Church became a highly centralized mass organization, independent of the state, oriented towards the Pope in Rome (hence: ultramontane or ‘beyond the Alps’), and capable of integrating and mobilizing its flock massively. The Pope advanced to become the daily leader in Church affairs, multiplying his interventions through encyclical letters and other statements. Bishops became fully dependent on the Pope’s authority, and priests, in turn, on their bishop’s will. As the nation state established a standardized structure of government and economy, the Catholic Church developed its own internal organization in order to compete with the nation state. At the same time, the Church followed the nation states’ example with regard to the centralization and standardization of its members’ ways of life, so that, in the end, the Catholic Church increasingly demonstrated traits which could easily be accorded to a ‘modern’ state. Catholics were educated to a higher standard by better trained priests and nuns, their daily lives were regulated by religious obligations from dawn till dusk, they were organized in a host of religious associations, and they were mobilized – sometimes in unprecedented numbers – in processions and pilgrimages. By the end of the 19th century, the ecclesiastical mass organizational model was extended to more secular areas: many large Catholic lay organizations were established in the fields of education, charity, culture, recreation, and even trade unions and political parties. The overall result was the construction of an impressive Catholic counter-society, which gave the Church unprecedented power and influence, both in strictly religious and more mundane affairs.

To my mind, in spite of all its merits, ultramontane mass Catholicism is an exemplification of a Church that had become – to use Benedict’s words – too worldly: it was a Church that was characterized by triumphalism and self-centeredness, relying on its traditional privileges, on its property, its formal and informal political power and influence, and on its use of social pressure, if need be, in order to impose its views, laws, and practices on the Catholic pillar of society, and sometimes even on society at large. In sum, ultramontane mass Catholicism was the opposite of a kenotic Church. The Second Vatican Council took the brave decision to distance the Church from this ecclesiastical model and to open it up to the modern world in a new way. But, as the dwindling numbers of faithful have shown, an evolution that started in the 1960s and is still continuing, it failed to reach the modern world and to respond to its needs. This obvious lack of success was not so much due to the fact that the Church is not yet worldly enough, but because it was caught off guard by the consequences of the individualist

and expressivist turns, which society has taken since the second half of the 20th century, as well as by the impact of the growing plurality of individual and collective religious and secular lifestyles on its hierarchical structure, on the content of its doctrine, and on the way to convey it to the people. Among many other things, these elements have made people loath to any authority and hierarchical organization. In this respect, the fate of the Catholic Church does not differ from that of governments, political parties, trade unions, cultural organizations, etc.

Since expressive individualism and pluralism profoundly mark the lives of the people in all Western societies, the above-mentioned paradox of the Church, being *in* but not *of* the world, can be further defined: How can the Church constructively engage in a dialogue with the seekers and their rather vague, eclectic, and mostly implicit ways of life, without becoming *of* the world, that is, identifying so completely with their lifestyles that it loses its identity and is no longer appealing anymore, because incapable to offer them orientation and meaning? As will be shown in the next sections, I think that a kenotic Church is able to respond to this paradox appropriately, and, hence, will be able to bridge its disjunction with the seekers.

Neo-Thomism

Ultramontane mass Catholicism went hand-in-hand with a specific way in which the Church formulated and substantiated its doctrine, namely, neo-Thomism. The main reason for neo-Thomism's popularity was that it proved to be able to answer the specifically modern shape of the question of the relation between faith and reason, namely, the rift between faith and scientific rationality. Especially since the second half of the 19th century, when positivism became more and more popular, this rift became a real threat for religion and theology. Positivism claimed that the religious and the metaphysical types of explanation, culminating in the arguments for God's existence and the immortality of the soul, were irrational, and had to be replaced by a type of explanation that was based only on 'positive', empirical facts.

Confronted with this threat, it was no wonder that the Church felt an urgent need to keep the progress of positivism in check, especially in the light of its growing popularity among the intelligentsia. Hence, it looked for a way to prove the fundamentals of Christian faith as objectively and scientifically as possible, so that they could stand the challenge of positivism. The result was neo-Thomism, which claimed to be a return to Thomas Aquinas, who, in his own time, had developed a synthesis of faith and reason. However, in comparison to the *pre-modern theology* of Thomas Aquinas, neo-Thomism actually had all the characteristics of *modern philosophy*, resting on the conviction that there

was a natural agreement between modern, rationalistic metaphysics and Christian faith. The neo-Thomist doctrine of God is an excellent illustration of this agreement. It understood God in ontological terms, namely, as Being itself, and concluded that Being is the proper name of God and that this name designates God's very essence. This highlights the ontotheological character of neo-Thomism: it conjoined the Biblical verse, in which God reveals his name, with modern ontology, and gave priority to the ontological problem of God's existence over the religious question of his name, and to philosophical argument over religious narrative. Another important aspect of neo-Thomism was that it substantiated in a rational way the (moral) ends of science and technology, and thus presented an alternative to the growing influence of social Darwinism on morality.

With hindsight, neo-Thomism was a well-developed attempt to bridge an important aspect of the disjunction between Christian faith and the modern world, namely, to adapt the former to modern philosophy and the scientific worldview. But, by doing so, it inevitably accepted the presuppositions of modern rationality. In particular, its ontological approach of God was as rationalistic and foundational as modern science. Because of this, neo-Thomism was able to enter into a constructive discussion with modern science and, indeed, offered an alternative to positivism. But, as we shall see in the fourth section in more detail, the flipside of this was that through the dominance of this rationalistic and foundational approach, Christian faith became too worldly. In particular, it took on too much of the appearance of a closed, quasi scientific system: very abstract, involved in metaphysical debates about God's existence as the ultimate foundation of reality, and having definitive and fixed answers to people's existential quests for meaning and hope. Phrased negatively, it failed to do justice to the apophatic tradition, which has played a crucial role in the Christian tradition of thinking God ever since Pseudo-Dionysius. Furthermore, it de-contextualized the religious idea of God by abstracting from the various practices of faith and their socio-historic and existential context: the God of neo-Thomistic philosophy does not function and does not have to function in the concrete contexts of personal piety or communal worship. Hence, neo-Thomism lost sight of these and many other, particularly existential, aspects of Christian faith, e.g., that it is first of all an expression of lived wisdom, commending a way of life, and embedded in a narrative. In other words, Christian faith is the trusting of God's promise of salvation and orientating one's life in accordance with this trust, not the conclusion of a rational philosophical argument. Once that expressive individualism and the ethics of authenticity had permeated Western society, it became clear that Christian faith was dramatically lacking the dialogical and kenotic attitude, which is imperative to relate its wisdom tradition to the existential quest of today's

individuals. So, a second aspect of the Church's response to the paradox of being *in* the world, i.e., overcoming its disjunction with the world of the seekers, without becoming *of* the world, i.e., getting totally absorbed in the expressive individualist mood and its lack of a larger perspective, consists in making the transition from a doctrinal, in particular neo-Thomist, to an existential, in particular wisdom-orientated, approach of Christian faith, and show the seekers that it offers hope and meaning to their lives.

THE SEEKERS AND THEIR CONTINGENT LIFESTYLES AND NARRATIVES

Before giving two examples of how the (Catholic) Church can bridge its disjunction with the seekers, I first want to present a short outline of the world in which they are living, especially with regard to their basic attitude towards the variety of lifestyles, Christian and secular. As a consequence of the deepening impact of expressive individualism on all Western societies since the 1960s, the compartmentalized society with its strong, hierarchical subsocieties has collapsed. As said, this process not only affected the (Catholic) Church, but all major societal organizations and even the state itself. The overall result is a society consisting of individualized individuals, who are embedded in multicultural and globalizing networks, gathering from time to time in smaller or larger groups around specific issues, one of which is religion. People who feel attracted to religion can, thanks to the rise of new institutional religions, the ubiquity of religious books and the internet, and the growing popularity of the tourist and legacy industries, opt for a wide variety in religious offerings inside as well as outside the traditional churches. Moreover, the predicament of choice cannot be reduced to a couple of 'big' choices to which one remains loyal throughout one's life. On the contrary, choice has become a never-ending process of muddling through a panoply of small choices, and keeping one's involvements and loyalties under the constant check of new choices.¹⁶

The above explains the rise of a plurality of (religious) lifestyles and their underpinning narratives, which characterizes the world of today's seekers. Moreover, this plurality goes hand-in-hand with the conviction that all lifestyles are nothing but contingent social constructions of reality, lacking a reasonable ground, only being chosen on the basis of the subjective feeling of their attractiveness, permanently open to reconsideration, and offering raw material for endless re-

¹⁶ Hellemans, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," pp. 24-26.

descriptions.¹⁷ Rorty, who has given a philosophical underpinning of this view, calls these lifestyles and narratives ‘final vocabularies’, which can only be substantiated by circular arguments whose strength does not reach beyond the persons or communities using them. Confronted with this situation, the seekers, especially the active ones, run the risk of becoming ironic, that is, “never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies [i.e., the narratives underpinning their lifestyles], and thus of their selves.”¹⁸ They put this into practice by continually re-describing themselves, society, and the world in ever new ways, by constantly re-creating themselves without referring to any normative eternal examples, like God, the Absolute, reason, truth, etc. In other words, they are constantly inclined to give up one vocabulary in favor of another, but never find peace in any of them. Consequently, they run the risk of not belonging to anything anymore, of completely losing their identity.

Rorty suggests a pragmatic way of dealing with this predicament, namely, to devote oneself to the vocabulary one is familiar with and, consequently, simply declare that there are limits to what one can take seriously. Many seekers opt for this pragmatic attitude: for the time being, they are committed to a (religious) lifestyle and take its underpinning narrative for granted, although they are at the same time aware that their attachment is completely contingent and that its underpinning narrative is circular; they believe in it only because they happen to be a member of this specific club and feel attracted to it for personal reasons. However, in order to work in today’s pluralist society, in which a common ground is almost completely lacking, especially when it comes to the day-to-day do’s and don’ts, their partisanship for a specific vocabulary has to remain confined to the private sphere, while in public they are expected to take a completely neutral attitude in order to safeguard peaceful co-existence.

It is obvious that this pragmatic attitude, which is not only taken by most seekers (active and passive ones), but is paradigmatic for our postmodern condition as such, poses fundamental problems. To start with, many of our substantial attachments, such as the kind of food we prefer, our morning or evening rituals, and even our native language, are indeed contingent matters, so that any claim to their truth makes no sense and is

¹⁷ I developed this further in Peter Jonkers, “Contingent Religions, Contingent Truths?” *Religions Challenged by Contingency. Theological and Philosophical Perspectives to the Problem of Contingency* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 167-170, and in Jonkers, “A Purifying Force For Reason,” pp. 82-85.

¹⁸ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 73f.

sometimes even inappropriate. But does this reasoning hold for our substantial commitments to (religious or secular) ways of life as well, which define our identity on a practical level? Are these commitments nothing but the expression of our personal attachment to a contingent lifestyle? If this were the case, people should not find any difficulties in performing a sort of ‘mental acrobatics’, namely, to be substantially committed in the private domain to their ways of life while, at the same time, recognizing their sheer contingency in the public domain. This quandary between private and public life becomes even more acute when religious people, who are convinced of the truth of their faith, enter the public domain in which, according to this postmodern paradigm, everyone is expected to take a completely neutral attitude: Are they really prepared to sing their religious song in the choir of the public debate under the condition that they keep their mouths shut?

Actually, I don’t think that humans are capable of performing such mental acrobatics, or that they are prepared to keep quiet in the public debate, nor should they. In contexts of both religious and secular ways of life people use words like ‘authentic’, ‘true’, and ‘universal’ in order to express something that not only counts for themselves or a small group of like-minded peers, but deserves to be recognized publicly. Obviously, the striving for public recognition of diverging ways of life often appears to be a painful confrontation of irreconcilable practices. Nevertheless, this striving shows that there is something essential at stake: others ask us to recognize that their ways of life are authentic attempts to realize fundamental human values, although we may completely disagree with them. In other words, the striving for public recognition of ways of life can only take place against the background of conflicting substantial meanings, because only then all partners in this process realize that there is something essential at stake. Therefore, we feel deeply frustrated when others don’t take these meanings seriously, and reduce them to contingent, private opinions whose acceptance does not rest upon their substance, but merely upon one’s subjective right to lead one’s own life, and on their not causing too much of a fuss.

What matters to me here is the fact that, in our striving for public recognition, we reach out towards something essential, towards an existential truth which is beyond our subjective, contingent self. In the end, we don’t want to be left alone with our contingent convictions and practices, nor are we prepared to leave others alone with theirs. We humans are too finite to be left alone with our own finitude, too dependent on the recognition of our substantial meanings by others to seriously consider ourselves as the only creators of truth and meaning in a meaningless world. This implies that the ‘mental acrobatics’ that is required to be a full member of the postmodern circus of life-styles, bidding for the public’s favor, falls short of expectations. We cannot live

with the idea that all our substantial attachments, which are essential for our identity, are, in the public domain, completely contingent. In many cases, we make use – at least implicitly – of notions like authenticity and truth, and by doing so, we claim that these commitments transcend the level of contingent social constructions.

It has to be noted that this argument should not be understood as a plea for *exclusive* recognition, which leads to opposing one religious or secular way of life to all the others. On the contrary, democratic societies can only exist by the grace of a plurality of religions and philosophies of life. But, in any case, the fact that people are so anxious to have their (religious or secular) ways of life publicly recognized, and are prepared to discuss them fiercely in the public debate, raises these traditions above the level of sheer contingency. With regard to the prime concern of this paper of how to overcome the disjunction between the Church and the seekers, the fact that so many people are caught nowadays in the paradox of being convinced of the contingency of their ways of life, while at the same time striving for an authentic and truthful orientation in life, offers a fruitful prospect for the Church: from a kenotic redefinition of its mission in the world, it can offer to today's seekers such an orientation without overwhelming their quest for meaning and hope with fixed, pre-given answers. It can do so by focusing on faith as a tradition of wisdom, as I will develop in more detail in the next section.

CHRISTIAN WISDOM AS A RESPONSE TO THE SEEKERS

The previous sections have made clear the paradoxical situation of the seekers as well as the main reasons why it has been so difficult for the Church to bridge its disjunction with them. They are caught between their gut feeling that all religions are but contingent social constructions and their need for an authentic and truthful orientation in life. The Church, for its part, has not yet been able, after the collapse of ultramontane mass Catholicism and rationalist neo-Thomism, to respond to the challenges of the increase of individual lifestyles and the radical plurality of worldviews. But the previous sections also resulted in two positive suggestions about how the Church can respond positively to the paradox that constitutes its essence, namely, to be *in* but not *of* the world: through its tradition of wisdom, it can offer the seekers concrete examples of truthful life-orientations, and thus bridge its disjunction with them, while at the same time holding on to the transcendent character of this orientation, without which it would lose its identity. First, it needs to engage in a constructive dialogue with the individualized lifestyles of the seekers and with the plurality of worldviews. Second, in order to be able to do so, the Church should take a modest and even kenotic stance. This enables it to present Christian faith as an authentic and truthful way of

life, and offer it to the seekers as a response to their searching, but without overwhelming them with fixed, pre-given answers.¹⁹ These two suggestions can be seen as exemplifications of a longstanding tradition in Christianity, namely, that of Christian wisdom. In what follows, I will develop in more detail the idea of Christian wisdom in a pluralistic world, and explore whether it contributes to bridging the disjunction of the Church with the seekers.

In the introduction of his book on Christian wisdom, David Ford notes that wisdom may be making a comeback, after being associated for a long time with old people, tradition, and conservative caution in a culture of youth, modernization, innovation, and risky exploration. The revival of wisdom is especially evident in areas where knowledge and (technical) know-how come up against questions of ethics, values, beauty, the shaping and flourishing of the whole person, the common good, and long-term perspectives.²⁰ Any wisdom needs to take seriously the desire for some sense of overall meaning and connectedness, and also for guidance in discernment in specific situations.²¹ This means that wisdom requires an objective as well as a subjective integration or connectedness, and, hence, has an aspect of theoretical learning as well as practical virtue: someone who has a vast knowledge about moral subjects, but who lives foolishly himself, would not be termed wise.²² In Christianity, the Books of Wisdom and the sayings of Jesus, as well as the life stories of people who live by them, are concrete examples of wisdom. But, through literary works and other forms of art, as well as through the lives of secular heroes, secular world-views are treasuries of wisdom too. The focus of Ford's book is to uncover Christian wisdom through an approach that can be summarized as "scriptural-expressivist" in its concern to draw from

¹⁹ Of course, this suggestion does not imply at all that (dogmatic) theology would become obsolete. On the contrary, since Christian faith cannot be reduced to *just* a way of life, in other words, to a contingent lifestyle, but has always presented itself as a truthful way of life, theology has to examine these truth claims critically.

²⁰ David Ford, *Christian Wisdom. Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

²¹ See John Kekes, "Wisdom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, 3 (1983), pp. 277-286.

²² Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life. Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Touchstone Press, 1989), p. 273. Several authors deplore the fact that, since modernity, the tension between theoretical, detached knowledge and life-oriented, engaged love has widened to a complete rift, which has obviously gone at the cost of the more holistic idea of wisdom. See: Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 269-271; Brenda Almond, "Seeking Wisdom," *Philosophy* 72, 281 (1997), pp. 423-428; Daniel Kaufman, "Knowledge, Wisdom, and the Philosopher," *Philosophy* 81, 1 (2006), pp. 129-151.

reading scripture a lively idiom of Christian wisdom today, one that forms its expression in sustained engagement with scripture's testimony to God and God's purposes amidst the cries of the world."²³

It is not my intention in this section to give a summary of Ford's book, since it mainly draws concrete ideas and practices of wisdom from the Bible, while this paper has a philosophical focus. Rather, I will develop two important examples of Christian wisdom, which Ford discusses in his book, namely, thinking biblically and scriptural reasoning. In particular, I will give a theoretical account of how they can contribute to present Christian faith as an authentic and truthful way of life, which is able to engage in a constructive dialogue with the world of the seekers. In order to do so, I will develop Ford's ideas on the basis of the research that has been done by Paul Ricoeur on linking the philosophic-theological thinking of God to wisdom, and by Nicolas Adams' research on the role of religion in the public debate in a pluralist society.²⁴

It goes without saying that, besides these two examples of Christian wisdom, a lot of others could be given, theoretical as well as practical ones. A practical example that has made quite an impression on me is the charitable work of the Community of San Egidio.²⁵ First of all, this community is one of the best illustrations of what it means to be a kenotic Church. On the basis of a profound Christian spirituality its members offer concrete (material) help to those who are in need, especially to people who, although living in Western societies, are not covered by social security. Through their practical commitment to the underclass, they also exemplify a form of practical Christian wisdom in today's predominantly secular society: for the members of San Egidio, the deep motivation, which enables them to give hope to the needy and, above all, to persevere even in times of adversity, does not result from a contingent way of life, but stems directly from their faith in the truth of the Christian message as source of inspiration and hope for their own lives as well as for all other people, especially for the lives of the needy. The practical wisdom expressed in this example is the following: the more your path of life takes you in the direction of charitable work, the more you need an underpinning that lets you experience that what you do not only matters to others, but also to God, that is, transcendentally. In other words, what

²³ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 3.

²⁴ Nicolas Adams, *Habermas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); André LaCoque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁵ For more information on San Egidio, see: http://www.santegidio.org/pa-geID/2/langID/en/THE_COMMUNITY.html.

you do *really* matters and thus gives you joy, even if the deprived people you work for do not (always) seem to be grateful, and even if you may not see the concrete results of your efforts yourself.

Thinking Biblically

Through his approach to the Bible that he has coined ‘thinking biblically’, Paul Ricoeur presents an alternative to neo-Thomism’s predominantly rationalistic approach of God’s existence and its inability to respond to the existential questions of today’s seekers. Ford reads Ricoeur’s attempt, especially his rereading of Exodus 3:14, as a contribution of prophetic wisdom:

The wisdom is in the way he [Ricoeur] differentiates, interrelates and rebalances several pairs of elements: Exodus 3:14 in its original language and context in conjunction with theology; theology with philosophy; Judaism with Christianity; Old Testament with New Testament; Christianity with Western culture. All this is in the service of rethinking God in such a way as simultaneously to do justice to past thought and worship, to address current issues prophetically, and to open the tradition up to yet further development: in short, the intellectual dimension of learning to live in the Spirit today.²⁶

Before examining Ricoeur’s wisdom-orientated thinking of God’s existence on the basis of Exodus 3:14, let us first take a closer look at his nuanced assessment of the broad and tumultuous conceptual history that “consisted in conjoining God and Being, and whose impact lasted for over fifteen hundred years.”²⁷ First of all, the translation of the original Hebrew text of Exodus 3:14 into Greek and then Latin was a major event in thinking because it linked the original text in an enduring manner to a metaphysical tradition stemming from Plato and Aristotle and continuing until the present day. Thus, this translation contributed in a decisive way to the intellectual and spiritual identity of the Christian West.²⁸ But this long tradition of *conjoining* God and Being did not bring any of the Church fathers and the great Scholastics to *confuse* God’s direct revelation

²⁶ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 217.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “From Interpretation to Translation,” *Thinking Biblically*, p. 356.

²⁸ Therefore, it would be naïve to think that exegesis could coincide, without the mediation of a tradition of reading, with the original signification of the text of Exodus, even with the presumed intention of its author. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

in Exodus 3:14 with a philosophical speculation about Being, or to think that this speculation would reveal to human reason the mystery of the divine essence in the intimacy of its innermost nature. Phrased positively, all of them considered the delicate balance between the apophatic tradition, according to which we cannot affirm anything about God, and the tradition of analogy, which holds that Being can be spoken of in affirmative statements, as the frame of reference in their thinking about God. "Apophatism and ontology thus ran along together side by side."²⁹

However, modern philosophy, and neo-Thomism in particular, upset this delicate balance. Ricoeur shows this by giving a critical analysis of what Gilson called the 'metaphysics of Exodus', according to which "Exodus lays down the principle from which Christian philosophy will be suspended."³⁰ This illustrates Gilson's claim that philosophy, in particular (neo-Thomist) ontology, naturally agrees with Christian faith. Neo-Thomism's stress on the natural character of this agreement is substantiated by the fact that it attached a far greater importance to the proofs of God's existence than Thomas Aquinas himself had done, and consequently, not only claimed to know *that* God is, but also *what* he is. This shows that neo-Thomism failed to do justice to the apophatic tradition that had been dear to Aquinas.³¹

In contrast to contemporary post-metaphysical philosophers like Heidegger, Levinas, and Marion, who think that the statement that Being is the proper name of God and that this name designates God's very essence is an aberration,³² Ricoeur takes a more nuanced position in this debate: he admits that "the rapprochement between the God of the Scriptures and the Being of the philosophers remains historically contingent and speculatively fragile."³³ It is contingent because nothing in Greek thought pointed to a fusion of God and Being. Moreover, this rapprochement is also speculatively fragile because the difference

²⁹ Ibid., p. 342.

³⁰ See: Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (Gifford lectures 1931-1932)* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1936), p. 51. Quoted in: Ricoeur, "From Interpretation to Translation," p. 353.

³¹ Ricoeur notes, however, that in the *Summa* "the first question posed concerning God shifts attention to the 'existential' aspect of *esse*, as though the question of existence takes priority over that of the name." See Ibid., p. 352.

³² Peter Jonkers, "God in France: Heidegger's Legacy," *God in France. Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God* (Leuven, Paris, Dudley MA: Peeters, 2005), pp. 1-42 ; Ricoeur, "From Interpretation to Translation," pp. 355-359.

³³ Ibid., p. 353. Ricoeur notes that Gilson, shortly before his death in 1978, admitted the contingency and fragility of this conjunction, although he still supported it almost half a century before. This shift in Gilson's position is a clear illustration of neo-Thomism's declining plausibility.

between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Pascal) remains insurmountable. The overall result is that “we find ourselves confronted with the nonphilosophical origin of God and his nonnecessity for philosophy.”³⁴ This implies that the event in thinking that has brought about the rapprochement between God and Being can, and should, according to many contemporary philosophers and theologians, be made undone as a consequence of a shift from its being plausible to its being suspect. Ricoeur, for his part, draws another conclusion. He accepts this rapprochement, in spite of its contingent and fragile character, as a historical fact that has shaped the intellectual and spiritual identity of the Christian West. Hence, it cannot, and should not, simply be rejected, but needs to be reinterpreted. In Ricoeur’s view, it is crucial for Christian faith that the philosophical communicability of the ‘wisdom for God’ is restored, which requires that the break between Exodus 3:14 and philosophical reason is reconsidered. Only then can the sapiential point of this Bible verse and, more in general, its significance for Western culture be preserved. Hence, he asks: “Why not assume that Exodus 3:14 was ready from the very beginning to add a new region of significance to the rich polysemy of the verb being, explored in other terms by the Greeks and their Muslim, Jewish and Christian heirs.”³⁵

In order to uncover the sapiential dimension of Exodus 3:14, Ricoeur starts with formulating some working hypotheses. The first one is that great religious texts express modes of thought that differ from philosophy and cannot be reduced to it, but nevertheless give rise to philosophical thinking. These texts belong to a kind of discourse that is not scientifically descriptive or explanatory, or even apologetic, argumentative, or dogmatic, but whose metaphorical language expresses profound wisdom.³⁶ With this hypothesis, Ricoeur not only takes distance from neo-Thomism’s natural agreement between metaphysics and Christian faith, but also from the post-metaphysical idea that the equation of God and Being is an intellectual aberration. Instead, he encourages us to think in a sapiential way the revelation of God’s name in relation to the verb Being.

A second working hypothesis concerns the relation between the Scriptures and the historical communities of reading and interpretation. A hermeneutical circle imposes itself here: in interpreting its Scriptures, the community in question interprets itself. A mutual election takes place here between those texts taken as foundational and the community that is founded by them. But this relation is also characterized by a fundamental asymmetry: the founding text *teaches* and the community *receives*

³⁴ Ibid., p. 354.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 341; see also p. 360.

³⁶ André LaCoque and Paul Ricoeur, “Preface,” *Thinking Biblically*, p. xvi.

instruction, which implies that, in this regard, faith is nothing other than the confession of this asymmetry. Readers and interpreters don't have to share the faith of this community, but if they want to enter this hermeneutical circle, they have to participate at least by way of imagination and sympathy in the act of adhesion by which the historical community recognizes itself as founded and comprised in and by this particular body of texts.³⁷

Which, then, are the essential elements of a wisdom-oriented interpretation of Exodus 3:14, and in what sense do they differ from the traditional ontological or ontotheological interpretation? First of all, keeping in mind the polysemy of the verb 'Being', we should guard against any ontological abstraction, or, more generally speaking, against any claim to intellectual mastery regarding this verb.³⁸ God's self-presentation and the complementary recognition of his 'being' by the faithful form an asymmetrical pair in which the one who presents himself holds the initiative, whereas the recognition implies a 'responsive' attitude. As tributaries of the apophatic tradition, medieval thinkers have heeded this warning against an (intellectual) appropriation of God's name far more than modern philosophy, including neo-Thomism.

Guarding the interpretation of Exodus 3:14 from ontological abstraction means, first of all, giving priority to Christian faith as a tradition of wisdom. But because this priority does not mean to sever the relation between faith and reason, it is legitimate to reflect on Christian wisdom philosophically in order to make it understandable to others. The idea that the metaphorical language of great religious texts expresses profound wisdom connects the narrative and the reflective dimension of religion. Thus, not only does it contribute to bridging the well-known opposition between the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of the philosophers and scientists, but it can also bridge the disjunction between the longstanding reflective tradition of Christian faith and the world of the seekers, which is dominated by narratives of all kinds. In order to engage in a constructive dialogue with the seekers, faith should be first communicated through the Christian narrative and the wisdom that is embedded in it. Because this narrative is connected to a reflective tradition, it is possible to think it philosophically and rephrase this narrative in a more conceptual way so that it, finally, can be linked to the existential questions of today's seekers, inside and outside the Church, and gives them food for thought. Taken together, these three steps exemplify Christian wisdom as a hermeneutical process, which can be offered as an authentic and truthful orientation to the seekers who are willing to enter this hermeneutical circle themselves.

³⁷ Ibid., p. xvi f.

³⁸ Ricoeur, "From Interpretation to Translation," p. 335.

This hermeneutical space, which is opened by the insight that God's self-revelation always transcends its recognition and conceptualization by humans, shows a further aspect of Christian wisdom: no instance, including the Church, may use his name in vain, e.g., by appropriating it, or reducing it to a set of fixed doctrinal formulas. In other words, fulfilling the commandment to do God's will does not reduce humans to spiritual automates, but encourages them to seek what letting their lives be oriented by God offers them and requires from them in a concrete situation. Especially in our times of radical lifestyle pluralism, every claim to infallible truth on doctrinal grounds is met with suspicion. In order to convince people of the existential truth of Christian faith, the idea of Christian wisdom as offering an authentic and truthful 'orientation in life' is far more appealing, especially to the seekers.

In order to further explain the hermeneutical nature of our orientation in existential matters, and hence of wisdom, I refer to Kant's essay on orientation.³⁹ Every kind of orientation requires a subjective principle: to orientate oneself in moral, or more generally speaking, existential matters means "to be guided, in one's conviction of truth, by a subjective principle of reason where objective principles of reason are inadequate."⁴⁰ This is so because we feel, on the one hand, an urgent (subjective) need to pass a true judgment about our life-orientations, while, on the other hand, we are painfully aware of the lack of objective knowledge that would make such a judgment univocally and universally true. In other words, to orientate oneself in moral matters is neither a matter of just doing whatever come to one's mind nor of objective science. So, the hermeneutical nature of wisdom lies in the fact that it is situated between doctrinal dogmatism and a contingent opinion.⁴¹ This means that the idea of Christian wisdom can be offered to the seekers as a plausible way out from their predicament of being caught between their gut feeling that all religions are contingent social constructions and their need for an authentic and truthful orientation in life.

Finally, "it seems reasonable to take the formula in Exodus 3:14 as an emphatic expansion of the self-presentation of God," thereby creating "an exceptional hermeneutical situation, namely the opening to a plurality of interpretations of the verb [being] used here."⁴² This plurality ranges

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, "Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren," *Werke in zehn Bänden. Band 5: Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), pp. 267-283.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 270, footnote.

⁴¹ For an analysis of the implications of Kant's idea of orientation in existential matters for philosophy of religion, see Peter Jonkers, "Redefining Religious Truth as a Challenge for Philosophy of Religion," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (2012): 139-159.

⁴² Ricoeur, "From Interpretation to Translation," p. 336, 337.

from the evocation of the personal God of Israel to the manifold meanings of the notion of Being. It is essential to keep this plurality in mind; it means that the revelation of God's name belongs to a different order than a speculation on Being, although these two orders have been conjoined since the beginning of Christianity. Hence, the ontological speculation about the neuter Being should not obliterate the theological reflection about the first person expression of God's name. From the perspective of Christian wisdom, this means that God remains first of all someone to whom we can pray, and someone whom we believe hears our prayers. In order to do justice to this idea, a paraphrastic translation of Exodus 3:14 is needed. In this context, Ricoeur refers to the one proposed by the modern Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig, for whom this paraphrase serves to underscore the shift from the neuter to the first person and, thus, from theoretical speculation to Christian wisdom.⁴³ Rosenzweig's translation does not identify God with eternal Being, or even with the existent, but with the existing (*der Daseiende*), present to the Dasein of human beings. Such a paraphrastic translation of Exodus 3:14 does "not convey a complete break with the verb *Sein*, but rather another extension of its polysemy."⁴⁴ But, at the same time, underscoring God as a person and, thus, closely relating him to the lives of human beings, highlights the sapiential dimension of Christian faith and offers the seekers of our times an authentic and true companion who orients their lives.

Scriptural Reasoning

Given the pluralist character of contemporary society and the experienced contingency of all its religions and secular worldviews, a second way in which the Church can open itself up to the world of the seekers is through a positive engagement with their religious and secular lifestyles, but without having to give up the sacredness of its scriptures or having to translate them into the language of secular reason. Ford proposes scriptural reasoning, understood as a wisdom-seeking engagement with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures, as a concrete way to realize such a dialogue.⁴⁵ Historically speaking, the reading of sacred scriptures has been overwhelmingly an intra-traditional affair, and scriptural reasoning, which is by definition inter-traditional, has been hardly encouraged by the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 360f. As a translation of Exodus 3:14, Rosenzweig suggests: "Ich werde dasein, als der ich dasein werde... ICH BIN DA schickt mich zu euch."

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 361.

⁴⁵ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 273. It has to be noted that scriptural reasoning refrains from theorizing its own bases, but consists of the practice of scriptural reasoning. For a description of this practice see: Ibid., pp. 275-278, and Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, pp. 239-243.

particular traditions of the participants. Therefore, engaging in such a reasoning requires, from a Catholic perspective, that the Church must take leave from the triumphalism and self-centeredness that characterized ultramontane mass Catholicism and become kenotic again; obviously, the same holds true for the participants from other religious traditions. This means that all of them have to “acknowledge the *sacredness* of the others’ scriptures to them (without having to acknowledge its authority for oneself),” as well as acknowledge that “they do not exclusively own their scriptures – they are *not experts on its final meaning*.”⁴⁶ However, if scriptural reasoning is meant to be relevant to the vast world of the seekers, most of whom only marginally or do not at all belong to one of the established religious traditions, it has to be extended to secular worldviews, as I will show at the end of this section.

Scriptural reasoning starts with recognizing that each tradition’s scripture is at the heart of its identity, because scriptures are formative for understanding God and God’s purposes, for prayer, worship and liturgy, for normative teaching, for imagination and ethos, etc. Sacred scriptures contain also long chains of reasoning, argumentation, and conclusions, where communal identities are expressed at a profound level. So, scriptural reasoning prevents these traditions from being treated as contingent social constructions. In order to show how these chains of deep reasoning can orientate the lives of people today they have to be made public. Scriptural reasoning fulfils this task by bringing together the interpretation of sacred scriptures, the practices of philosophical and theological reasoning, and ‘public issue’ questions.⁴⁷ But, as is common knowledge, each of these scriptures can also be used to frame the identity of a tradition in a problematic way, e.g., by opposing it to other identities, legitimatizing violence, claiming superiority, pronouncing blanket condemnations, etc.⁴⁸ This refers to the pitfall of one (religious) tradition striving for exclusive recognition, as pointed out in the third section of this paper. In order to avoid this and other pitfalls, scriptural reasoning acknowledges the *sacredness* of these scriptures to the members of each tradition, but without acknowledging their *authority* to others. The result is that scriptural reasoning is polyphonic and cannot be reduced to an authoritarian monologue of one tradition, distorting all the other ones.

But the need to avoid the pitfall of a monological distortion of other traditions does not only concern religions, but also secular worldviews. The separation of state and church, which characterizes all democratic

⁴⁶ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 279f. See also Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, p. 243.

⁴⁷ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 277, 279; Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, p. 242.

⁴⁸ Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 274.

societies, does not mean that religious deep reasonings may be put on the procrustean bed of secular rationality; nor can the acceptability of these reasonings in politics, let alone in the public debate, be judged by the standards of this rationality. In other words, in order to keep democratic society truly polyphonic, it is essential to realize that the separation of state and church cannot be used as a pretext to exclude religious convictions from the public debate, and even less that secular liberalism is the only acceptable philosophy of life.⁴⁹ In sum, as I have shown in the previous section, the recognition of the sacredness of the Scriptures to a community that is founded by them does not require secular people to acknowledge the authority of these scriptures for themselves. But when these people enter the hermeneutical circle of the public debate, they are required to accept the idea that Christian faith expresses a kind wisdom that can be interpreted philosophically, and, hence, offers food for thought to them. This philosophical interpretation of Christian wisdom serves as a common ground for secular and religious people.

The above shows that scriptural reasoning can mediate between the sacred scriptures of different religions, as well as between religions and secular worldviews. It realizes this aim by making deep (religious) reasonings public so that others, religious as well as secular people, may learn to understand them and discover why particular trains of reasoning are *reasonings*, and not just particular assumptions, contingent social constructions, and why they are attractive or problematic.⁵⁰ In other words, scriptural reasoning enables religious and secular traditions to be recognized by people who do not belong to this specific tradition, but without having to accept any claim for *exclusive* recognition. It is able to fulfill this task because it is a manifestation of religious wisdom, which is the fruit of a much broader kind of rationality than, say, the rationalistic, foundational kind of rationality of neo-Thomism. As pointed out above, wisdom, including Christian wisdom, is embedded in the sacred scriptures of religious traditions and in the key texts of secular traditions, all of them trying to respond to the existential questions and needs of people.

Hence, scriptural reasoning is able to understand deep religious and secular reasonings in their own right. They aim at establishing a hermeneutical space that is shared by various religious and secular traditions. This shared space does not so much rest on a specific type of

⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Rawls distinguishes between public reason, which is the basis of political liberalism as a political conception and therefore has to be secular, and secular reason as an element of liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism. Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 200.

⁵⁰ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, p. 242; see also Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 281.

rationality, e.g., the procedural approach of Habermas and Rawls (see below), but is the result of the shared existential issues to which all religions and secular worldviews are trying to respond. In this context, it is also important to note that the fact that scriptural reasoning is aimed at a shared space by making the reasonings of religious and secular traditions public, does not mean that it strives after consensus, but rather after friendship, that is, the recognition of the sacred nature of each other's scriptures and a shared desire to study them.

As Adams has shown, scriptural reasoning offers a promising alternative to the views of Habermas and Rawls, two prominent philosophers who have studied the place of religions in democratic and, hence, pluralist societies.⁵¹ As noted above, all participants in scriptural reasoning acknowledge the sacredness of the others' scriptures to them without necessarily acknowledging its authority for themselves. This dissociation of sacredness and authority is puzzling for Habermas as well as for Rawls; they stress, instead, that these two characteristics of religious scriptures are two sides of the same coin, and infer from this the intrinsically authoritarian and exclusivist character of religious traditions. Since this authoritarianism leaves, in their eyes, no room for tolerable disagreement, recognizing the sacred character of these scriptures is at odds with the liberal character of modern democracies. Therefore, religious insights have to be translated into a secular language (Habermas),⁵² or comply with the so-called proviso (Rawls), if non-public, religious reason is to be introduced in the political sphere.⁵³ However, if religious traditions are required to make their deep reasonings public under the conditions of secular reason, they are not understood anymore in their own right, since they not only have to give up the authority, but also the sacredness of their scriptures. This is so because the sacredness of these texts precludes their translation in another, in particular secular, language just as, for similar reasons, a poem cannot simply be restated in other words.

How, then, can scriptural reasoning realize the recognition of the sacred character of sacred scriptures, while avoiding that this recognition becomes exclusive? The answer is that it only coordinates discussions between members of different traditions without requiring a commitment

⁵¹ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, pp. 243-246.

⁵² Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 109.

⁵³ For Rawls, non-public, religious reasons may be introduced in the public political discussion, "provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support." See John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *Political Liberalism*, p. 462.

to a universal sphere that transcends those traditions, in particular, a commitment to secular reason. Participants engage in scriptural reasoning only as members of a particular tradition, and acknowledge no authority above that of their own tradition than the authority of God. But by doing so, they acknowledge that God is not circumscribed by their tradition, but is the non-circumscribable possibility of its very existence. "God is greater than language, greater than traditions, greater than scripture."⁵⁴ The crucial difference between a secular, horizontal idea of transcendence (secular reason) and a religious, vertical one (God) is that the former can be claimed by a particular group, while the latter cannot. Hence, the people committed to religious traditions may be far more inclined to accept scriptural reasoning as the appropriate way to make their deep reasonings public than when they are required to fulfill the proviso or to translate them into the language of secular reason.

Moreover, secular reason can only realize a *neutral* space to which anyone or no-one belongs. This corresponds to Rawls' idea of public reason, which he defines as "the kind of reasons they [i.e., citizens] may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake. I [i.e., Rawls] propose that in public reason comprehensive doctrines [religious, philosophical, and moral] of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens."⁵⁵ By contrast, scriptural reasoning prepares a *shared* space, which means that the members of religious traditions accept the claim that the other belongs there without stating further conditions as to the nature of their reasonings. This explains why it is aimed at friendship, resulting from respectfully studying religious traditions, rather than at consensus on specific issues.

A final reason why scriptural reasoning offers a promising alternative to the requirement to translate religious insights into secular rationality is that it does not make a strong contrast between argumentation and narrative. This approach is contrary to that of Habermas and Rawls, who focus on the argumentative value of non-public, religious reason and neglect the narrative nature of sacred scriptures. Yet, because scriptural reasoning brings together the interpretation of sacred scriptures, the practices of philosophical and theological reasoning, and 'public issue' questions, there is argumentation at every stage of it. This is so because, again, scriptural reasoning is an expression of religious wisdom, which is a unity of faith and reason, and is practiced in a shared, not in a neutral, space. In other words, through its origin in religious wisdom, scriptural reasoning manifests a broader kind

⁵⁴ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, p. 249.

⁵⁵ Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," p. 441.

of reasonableness than secular reason, and is therefore able to include argumentation *and* narration.

In sum, “the crucial feature of scriptural reasoning [...] is that it does not require participants to bracket or suspend or conceal their traditional identities for the purpose of conversation and argumentation,”⁵⁶ as secular reason does. Instead, by making deep religious reasonings public, scriptural reasoning enables the participants to see the wisdom embedded in their own and others’ traditions. Ideally, this kind of reasoning can be used by the Church to bridge its disjunction with the seekers and their – often implicit – worldviews. It could encourage them to see the wisdom that is embedded in their own worldviews so that they don’t see them anymore as contingent social constructions. In comparison to the secular rationality proposed by Habermas and Rawls as a common, neutral ground, I am convinced that scriptural reasoning offers a far better way for discussing (religious and secular) ways of life in a radically pluralist society because it rests on a shared ground and is aimed at friendship instead of consensus.

CONCLUSION

The leading question of this volume is how the Catholic Church, being in a minority position in most Western societies, can overcome its disjunction with the seekers and appeal again to society at large, and especially to the seekers. In this paper, I have tried to contribute to answering this question from a philosophical perspective. This means that the ‘how’ in the overcoming of this disjunction is discussed on a principled, not on an empirical, level. Furthermore, I tried to comply with one of Ricoeur’s working hypotheses, namely, to enter in a hermeneutical circle, which is required in order to interpret Christian faith from a philosophical perspective without reducing it to something that is at odds with its interpretation by the Christian community. To phrase it positively, my interpretation has been based on a deep sympathy with Christian faith, although, at the same time, I had to keep some distance from it, as is required by the philosophical character of my interpretation in contrast to a theological approach.

The core of my answer is, first of all, that the paradoxical nature of the relation of the Church to the world, namely, of being *in* but not *of* the world, prevents it from wanting to overcome its existing disjunction with (the seekers in) contemporary society by identifying itself completely with it. Besides this fundamental theological reason, there is also an important philosophical reason for choosing a different approach: given the fact that so many people are caught in a predicament of being

⁵⁶ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, p. 252.

convinced of the contingency of their ways of life and, at the same time, desperately looking for an authentic and truthful orientation, the Church should offer Christian wisdom as a way out of this situation. In the last sections of my paper, I have discussed several examples of Christian wisdom, but, of course, there are many more. However, in order to be effective, the Church should take into account that it is, and will remain for the foreseeable future, in a minority position in most Western societies, as well as that the latter are fundamentally marked by expressive individualism and radical pluralism. This means that it can by no means operate anymore from a position of power, as it used to do during the times of ultramontane mass Catholicism, but has to redefine itself in a kenotic way. Apart from the fact that, from a sociological perspective, there is no alternative for this new stance, it also is the best option for religious reasons: as long as the Church relied on its worldly power it was too worldly and was, thus, paradoxically, unable to truly open itself up to the world. Therefore, it should instead start with taking the predicament of today's seekers radically serious and refrain from overwhelming them with fixed, pre-given answers. This opens a hermeneutical space for asking questions about existential truth, meaning, and hope. In this situation, the Church can offer its tradition of wisdom as an authentic and truthful perspective on the world.

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CHAPTER VI

THE EXILE OF THE RELIGIOUS SUBJECT: A NEWMANIAN PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

TERRENCE MERRIGAN

INTRODUCTION

The claim developed in this paper is that John Henry Newman's reflections on the genesis of religion, and the challenges facing the religious subject, resonate with, and even illuminate, the contemporary debate about the future of religion in our secular age.¹

In what follows, I shall attempt to make the case for Newman as a worthy interlocutor of contemporary theorists by reflecting on the following themes: first, the (controverted) condition of the religious subject in our secular context; second, Newman's anticipation of, and reflections on, the inevitability of the cultural shift we now characterize as secularization; and, third, a Newman-inspired reflection on the future of the religious subject in our secular age.

DWELLERS, SEEKERS, AND TINKERERS IN A SECULAR AGE

Dwellers, Seekers and the Dispersal of the 'Self'

According to Charles Taylor, our age is characterized by the quest for 'selfhood', understood as an expression of "the moral ideal of being true

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), pp. 20-21 distinguishes three modes of secularity: *secularity 1* which refers to the emergence of "secularized public spaces," *secularity 2* which concerns "the decline of belief and practice," and *secularity 3* which concerns "the new conditions of belief" that have emerged and which bring with them "an end to the naïve acknowledgement of the transcendent, or of goals or claims which go beyond human flourishing." *Secularity 3* denotes a culture in which the option for belief is by no means self-evident and may well be very contested, though Taylor is quick to acknowledge that secularity finds different expressions in different cultures and "develops under the pressure of different demands and aspirations in different civilizations." His focus is "the civilization whose principal roots lie in what used to be called 'Latin Christendom'," and particularly with "the West, or the North Atlantic world," the world which Newman also focused upon.

to oneself, in a specifically modern understanding of that term.”² That modern understanding is “encapsulated” in the term “authenticity.” What is at stake here, according to Taylor, is “a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths.”³

In the fullest sense of the term, authenticity is the fruit of an ongoing quest for self-expression which threads its way between the demand to be faithful to the impulses of one’s inner life and the accumulated wisdom (often identified as ‘tradition’) of those who have undertaken a similar quest in other times and contexts.⁴ This means that the quest for authenticity will almost inevitably be characterized by detours, wrong turns and even outright reversals. What is essential, however, is the determination to maintain the balance between following one’s own lights and allowing oneself to be challenged by the insights of those others who have undertaken similar journeys.⁵

One of the more striking features of the discourse that has been developed in the attempt to characterize the condition of the modern (and postmodern) subject in her quest for authenticity, is the extensive reliance on the categories ‘seeker’ and ‘dweller’, with the bulk of the attention (and perhaps even the sympathy) being directed to the seeker.

The terminology of dwellers and seekers is generally attributed to Robert Wuthnow who employed it in his study of spirituality in America since the 1950’s. Spirituality here denotes “the beliefs and activities by which individuals attempt to relate their lives to God or to a divine being or some other conception of transcendent reality.”⁶

² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 15.

³ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 26. See also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 25-41, 507-508, 539-544. The notion of ‘inner depths’ is inextricably bound up with Taylor’s notion of the “buffered self” or “buffered identity,” understood as “the only locus of thoughts, feelings, [and] spiritual élan,” (p. 30) a “space within [which] is constituted by the possibility of introspective self-awareness.”

⁴ See Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 41: “Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.” Taylor (p. 66) criticizes postmodern thinkers for seeking to “deligitimate horizons of significance,” and points to “Derrida, Foucault, and their followers” as “proposing deviant forms. The deficiency takes the form of forgetting about one whole set of demands on authenticity while focusing exclusively on another.” See also pp. 68-69, 72-73, 77-78, 82-83.

⁵ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 75, acknowledges that the quest for authenticity can rather easily slide into individualism but opines that the most adequate response to its presence in Western culture is not seeking to “root it out” but “espousing the ideal at its best, and trying to raise our practice up to this level.” See also p. 66.

⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950’s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. viii.

A spirituality of ‘dwelling’ emphasizes “*habitation*,” that is to say, it identifies a “definite place in the universe” where God dwells and which humans too can inhabit. Dwellers feel “secure” in their “sacred space.”⁷

A spirituality of seeking, by contrast, emphasizes “*negotiation*: individuals search for sacred moments that reinforce their conviction that the divine exists, but these moments are fleeting” and the seeker is inevitably confronted with “new spiritual vistas” which he or she feels almost compelled to explore. Seekers, then, are thrown back on themselves and obliged to make a whole host of decisions about their spirituality, including “how to pursue it, what to believe, [and] where to find helpful information.”⁸ More fundamentally, the self, which has now become “problematic,” because it has been unmoored from its anchoring in tradition, “must be refashioned in a way that gives it the authority to make these decisions.”⁹ Indeed the seeker ‘reconceptualizes’ the self, regarding it as the source of “personal power and...as the key to spiritual wisdom.”¹⁰ However, as Wuthnow points out, this ‘self’ or subject is by no means a stable entity. It is, so to speak, perpetually in search of ‘itself’ such that “the height of spiritual existence becomes the process of journeying, seeking, perceiving, and experiencing.”¹¹

The turn to ‘experiencing’ may manifest itself in what has been described as “psychological polytheism,” a condition which, Wuthnow acknowledges, is well-suited to a culture in which the spiritual reality is dispersed. The self that is characterized by psychological polytheism, what Wuthnow calls the “dispersed self,” is a somewhat ambivalent entity, embracing a “transcendent, unified being – the soul – and the self that attends fully to the reality of each momentary experience.”¹²

⁷ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 3.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 147. See Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – To Whom,” *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Christian Philosophical Studies, 1 (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 17, where Taylor describes ‘seekers’ as persons “looking for meaning, and often...for more than this, for some form of life which will bring them in contact with the spiritual, however they define this.”

⁹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 147.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 152.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 149: “In a shift away from objective truth, the self becomes problematic because its reality also comes into doubt. Nevertheless, the self’s importance is elevated because it is the locus of questions about meaning.” See Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – To Whom,” pp. 17-24. See also Robert Wuthnow, “Reassembling the Civic Church: The Changing Role of Congregations in American Civil Society,” *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 163-180, at 166.

¹² Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 160.

Wuthnow regards the idea of psychological polytheism as “helpful for understanding the kind of self that fits contemporary experience” and especially the contemporary understanding of spirituality as the process of engagement with a ‘transcendence’ which may make itself felt in any and every dimension of mundane experience.¹³ The ‘dispersed self’ is “defined” by “a wide variety of encounters and experiences,” and though it is “always more than these experiences, it must be understood to reside in them as well and thus to be as scattered as they are.”¹⁴

It is not entirely clear how the tension between an identifiable self and a self that is “as scattered” as the varieties of religious experience, is to be resolved. Wuthnow admits that, “the diverse ways self and spirituality come together are still in flux,” but he insists that in the contemporary context, “there is an affinity between them.” As he puts it, “the collapse of a sacred canopy under which to live in spiritual security has awakened a compulsion for faith of a new kind, a faith that requires inner knowledge and that must be renewed and renegotiated with life experience.”¹⁵

Many researchers have appealed to the “subjectivization [or subjectivation] thesis” to account for the decline of traditional forms of religion and the turn to ‘spiritualities’.¹⁶ They point out that those people who display an interest in the spiritual or the ‘sacred’ often tend towards “those forms which help them cultivate the unique ‘irreplaceabilities’ of

¹³ Idem., p. 160: “The most important implication of these views of the soul...is that spirituality must be found within ordinary life and is thus as varied and unpredictable as everyday experience and as individuals themselves.”

¹⁴ Idem., p. 162.

¹⁵ Idem., p. 167.

¹⁶ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Transformation of Symbols in Industrial Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 105, 107-117. As Luckmann already pointed out in 1967 (and as recent research on spirituality seems to confirm), “unless we postulate a high degree of reflection and conscious deliberation” on the part of individual men and women, it is to be expected that “the prevalent individual systems of ‘ultimate’ significance will consist of a loose and rather unstable hierarchy of ‘opinions’” which serve to legitimate the “situation-bound (primarily emotional and affective) priorities” arising in the ‘private’ lives of ‘religiously’-inclined subjects. See Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 6. Regarding the need for nuanced judgment, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 508-510. Taylor points out that the “new forms of spiritual quest” which characterize modernity are often dismissed as “intrinsically trivial or privatized” but he regards this view as a gross oversimplification. Taylor contends that much contemporary ‘spirituality’ is best understood as a genuine expression of the quest for “authenticity” and spiritual depth, and has its roots in “a humanism which is inspired by the Romantic critique of the modern, disciplined, instrumental agent.”

their subjective lives [rather] than those which emphasize the importance of conforming to higher authority,”¹⁷ a claim that sits well with Wuthnow’s analysis. This has led researchers to develop a distinction between ‘life-as-religion’, which involves “subordinating subjective-life [sic] to the ‘higher’ authority of transcendent meaning, goodness and truth,” and ‘subjective-life spirituality’ which “invokes the sacred in the cultivation of unique subjective-life.”¹⁸ Practitioners of the latter make “little or no distinction between personal and spiritual growth.” The upshot of this evolution is that the subjective turn in religion must be conceived of in terms of “a spectrum between two poles,” namely, “individuated subjectivism” where self-reliance is emphasized, and “relational subjectivism” where encounters with others are regarded as crucial for the development of one’s subjective life.¹⁹

The Turn to Practice and the Emergence of the Tinkerer

Wuthnow expresses his own reservations about the prospects for ‘seekers’ and he in fact proposes “an alternative” to both “the dwelling-oriented and seeking-oriented spiritualities,” namely, “the idea of a practice-oriented spirituality.”²⁰ He acknowledges that this alternative, which might be summarized as deliberate and systematic engagement with established religious practices and teachings, and the great texts of particular religious traditions, “has been part of all religious traditions,”²¹ and that “it generally takes place in ordinary life.”²² Indeed, he refers to no less a systematist of practice than Ignatius of Loyola to highlight the depth and comprehensiveness such practice can attain.

Wuthnow acknowledges that intentional spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, the examination of one’s deepest desires, and “focusing attention in a worshipful manner on one’s relationship to God,”²³ require a significant investment of time and energy.²⁴ However,

¹⁷ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, p. 10.

¹⁸ Idem., *The Spiritual Revolution*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Idem., *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 10, 13. See also pp. 125-126, 149; see Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 14.

²⁰ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 7. Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 170 comments that, “Broadly conceived, spiritual practice is a cluster of spiritual intentional activities concerned with relating to the sacred.” See also Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 127-129.

²¹ Idem., p. 16.

²² Idem., p. 170. See also Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, pp. 127-135.

²³ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 178.

²⁴ Idem., p. 178.

in time, these practices “tend to become sufficiently part of the [religious subject’s] personal identity that it is unnecessary to think about each step.”²⁵ This process of internalization distinguishes practice from mere technique.

The ultimate goal is to develop a capacity to ‘discern’ the divine. Wuthnow notes that, while “the role of the inner self is often mentioned in this regard,” there has been a shift as far as seeker-oriented spirituality is concerned “because spirituality is now connected with who one is, not simply with roles that one may play.” As immersion in a particular set of practices progresses, the feelings are effectively displaced, so to speak, and no longer regarded as reliable indicators of authentic spiritual life. The practice itself becomes “rewarding”²⁶ and promotes, indeed even inculcates, a distinctive pattern of behaviour.

Wuthnow refers to the behavioural change wrought by practice as its “moral dimension.”²⁷ The commitment to specific practices is what “most clearly distinguishes [practice-oriented spirituality] from a spirituality of seeking.” In contrast to the latter, where “negotiating and choosing emphasize little more than what is in one’s self-interest or what works or feels right at the moment,” the former “requires integrity, a commitment to the internal logic and rule of the practice itself.” What is more, “it generates a basis from which to make judgments that are internally consistent.”²⁸ In the long run, spiritual practice involves “deep reflection about who one is,” and can, in time, enable the practitioner to discover “a core narrative that provides coherence to their practice over time.”²⁹ Wuthnow’s own research also indicated that spiritual practice often seemed to free its adepts “from material concerns and other self-interested pursuits so that they could focus on the needs of others.”³⁰

In any case, practices can provide “some of the security [formerly] offered by the familiarity and legitimacy of a dwelling-oriented spirituality,” and they offer the additional benefit of being “more portable than sacred places, permitting practitioners to perform them under more diverse circumstances.”³¹

Nearly a decade after the appearance of his work on seekers and dwellers, Wuthnow published an extensive study of the shape of American religion among “*younger adults* (or simply *young adults*),”

²⁵ Idem., p. 179.

²⁶ Idem., p. 180.

²⁷ Idem., pp. 16, 184.

²⁸ Idem., p. 185.

²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, “Spirituality and Spiritual Practice,” *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 316.

³⁰ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 192.

³¹ Idem., p. 184.

“who were between the ages of 21 and 45 in the years from about 1998 to 2002,” the so-called ‘busters’ or ‘millennials’ (though Wuthnow prefers to avoid such terminology).³² In describing the religious practices of this group, Wuthnow moved beyond the terminology of dwellers and seekers and opined that “the single word that best describes young adults’ approach to religion and spirituality – indeed life – is *tinkering*. A tinkerer [*bricoleur*] puts together a life from whatever skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand.” When tinkerers “need help from experts, they seek it. But they do not rely on only one way of doing things. Their approach to life is practical. They get things done, and usually this happens by improvising, by piecing together an idea from here, a skill from there, and a contact from somewhere else.”³³

A tinkerer may well be a ‘seeker’, but in contrast to a seeker, a tinkerer need not be ‘unsettled’ or plagued by “uncertainty” in the face of the “pastiche” that life, and her attempt to construct a response to life’s questions, involves.³⁴ While ‘tinkering’ is not exclusive to today’s ‘young adults’, the “social environment” in which it takes place has evolved and its impact is felt most strongly by the young. Young adulthood now extends over a longer period of time, and is characterized by greater uncertainty about the future and shifting expectations regarding what is desirable and even possible on the level of personal and family life, relationships, employment, and so on.³⁵ In such a context, a context shaped by ever higher levels of education, globalization, and instant access to an unprecedented and continually expanding supply of lifestyle choices, there is no “single best answer to our questions or needs.” Hence, “it becomes not only possible but also necessary to cobble together one’s faith from the options at hand.”³⁶

³² Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, p. 6. Emphasis in original. See p. 2: “The future of American religion is in the hands of adults now in their twenties and thirties.... This age group is smaller than the baby boomer generation was. It is also less distinctly defined. Some observers call it Generation X or Generation Y (or both). Some refer to its members as ‘millennials’, noting that they differ from baby boomers in having come of age around the turn of the millennium. Still others refer to it simply as the ‘next wave’.”

³³ *Idem.*, pp. 13-14. Wuthnow appeals to Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) for the notion of tinkerer or *bricoleur*.

³⁴ Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, p. 15.

³⁵ *Idem.*, p. 16.

³⁶ *Idem.*, p. 114. Wuthnow discusses the “changing life worlds of young adults” at length on pp. 20-50. He identifies “seven key trends,” namely, delayed marriage, the choice for fewer children at a later age, the uncertainties of work and money, the increase in higher education (“for some”), loosening relationships, globalization, and the information explosion.

The religiously inclined subject, then, be he seeker, dweller, or tinkerer is thrown back upon himself and his prospects have become the object of considerable research and much ecclesiastical and theological soul-searching. In what follows, I will argue that these prospects were already analysed in a profound fashion by Newman, and that his reflections serve both to substantiate and to challenge the analysis provided by contemporary commentators.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND THE SHADOW OF THE SECULAR

Newman's Context... and Ours

While Newman's nineteenth-century context was clearly not ours, it was by no means as remote from ours as one might be inclined to think. So, for example, a commentator on the *Religious Census of England*, taken in 1851, observed that "the masses of [the] working population" might best be described as "unconscious Secularists" in view of their conviction that, since "the fact of a future life is (in their view) at all events susceptible of some degree of doubt, while the fact and the necessities of a present life are matters of direct sensation, it is therefore prudent to attend exclusively to the concerns of that existence which is certain and immediate – not wasting energies required for present duties by a preparation for remote, and merely possible, contingencies."³⁷ Another commentator added an interesting nuance by declaring that "if the vague and residual beliefs of the masses be taken into consideration, 'unconscious Christians' would be as accurate a description of [these masses] as 'unconscious Secularists'."³⁸ Whatever appellation may have been more appropriate,

³⁷ See Horace Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales – Abridged from the Original Report* (London: George Routledge & Co., 1854), pp. 93-96. This text is, in fact, Mann's report on the 1851 census. At this time there was indeed a Secularist movement at work in England and Mann refers to it. Indeed, he felt that the masses shared many of the religious views of the secularists. Mann attributed the gap between the masses and those actively practicing religion to four causes: the persistence of class distinctions (the masses did not feel welcome in the established church); the "insufficient sympathy exhibited by professed Christians for the alleviation of the... poverty, disease, and ignorance" afflicting the poor; suspicion on the part of the masses regarding the motivations of the church's ministers; and the endemic poverty of the masses which meant that the struggle for life left no room to engage with the church's (not always immediately relevant) teaching.

³⁸ 'Secularism', in nineteenth-century England, was a multifaceted notion and some of its most prominent advocates (e.g., George J. Holyoake (1817-1906), who coined the term) made great efforts to downplay its anti-religious heritage

the fact was, as the 1855 report noted, that these ‘unconscious secularists’ “were never or but seldom seen in our religious congregations.”³⁹

Newman’s own reflections on his context resonate remarkably with Taylor’s dissection of the immanent frame and with certain features of the analysis provided by contemporary proponents of the so-called ‘classical secularization theory’, that is to say, those who hold that modernity inevitably means a decline in the social significance of religion.⁴⁰ So, for example, in 1873, Newman delivered a sermon on what he called “the infidelity of the future.”⁴¹ The occasion was the opening of a seminary dedicated to the education of future priests.

In the sermon, Newman pondered the shape of the world to come and its significance for religion, especially, but not exclusively, of a Catholic variety. Newman portrayed this world, quite starkly, as “simply irreligious,” a world which had ‘cast off’ the very “idea of religion” and, with it, the notions of “unseen powers who governed the world” and a universal moral law not of human making.⁴² Whereas, in previous ages, Christianity had had to contend primarily with enemies from without, in the age to come even “the elect themselves,” that is to say, those whose faith had seemed secure, would be “in danger of falling away.”⁴³

and contents (pp. 150-151). Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement – 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), p. 292, sums up the movement by describing it “as basically an agitation for a scheme of rights: the right to think for oneself; the right to differ; the right to assert difference of opinion; the right to debate all vital opinion.” Holyoake defended his view of secularism by declaring that, since “our knowledge is confined to this life, and testimony, conjecture, and probability are all that can be set forth with respect to another life, we think we are justified in giving the *precedence* to the duties of this state, and in attaching *primary* importance to the morality of man to man” (emphasis in original).” See Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 151 quoting Holyoake, *Reasoner*, p. 19 January, 1853. The *Reasoner* was a periodical edited by Holyoake between 1846-1861. Royle’s study is based largely on this periodical. See Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 5. Regarding the notion of ‘unconscious Christians’, see p. 233.

³⁹ Mann, *Census of Great Britain*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 149. This succinct definition is adopted by Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2. Bruce insists that there is a causal relation between “the social power of religion, the number of people who take it seriously, and how seriously anyone takes it.”

⁴¹ John Henry Newman, *Faith and Prejudice’ and other Unpublished Sermons of Cardinal Newman*, (ed.) The Birmingham Oratory (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956).

⁴² Newman, *Faith and Prejudice’*, pp. 124-125.

⁴³ Idem., pp. 117, 125.

The root cause of this “plague of infidelity” would be the apparent irrelevance of traditional religious beliefs to the prevailing social and intellectual orders, both of which, in the late-nineteenth century, were already proving quite capable of functioning effectively without any reference to religious orthodoxy and, more insidiously, both of which were operating on fundamental presuppositions (“first principles” in Newman’s terminology) which were far removed from those which had undergirded traditional ‘Western’ society.⁴⁴

Writing in 1864, he lamented, in particular, the erosion of belief in Europe:

What a scene, what a prospect, does the whole of Europe present at this day! and not only Europe, but every government and every civilization through the world, which is under the influence of the European mind! Especially, for it most concerns us, how sorrowful, in the view of religion, even taken in its most elementary, most attenuated form, is the spectacle presented to us by the educated intellect of England, France, and Germany!⁴⁵

The conviction that Christian culture was threatened by a “tide of unbelief” had long been a feature of Newman’s thought and, on the occasion of his elevation to the cardinalate in 1879, he went so far as to declare that very nearly his entire life had been dedicated to ‘resisting’ the views which were gaining ground everywhere (and which Newman identified collectively as “liberalism”). These views included the claims that “there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another;” that all religions “are to be tolerated, for all are matters of

⁴⁴ Idem., p. 117. Newman defined ‘first principles’ as propositions “with which we start in reasoning on any subject given subject-matter” (p. 45), or “opinions which are held without proof as if self-evident.” See John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. Ian Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 45, 355-356; Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (Leuven: Peeters; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 38-39, 212-215. See also n. 59 below. There is a very striking parallel between Newman’s notion of ‘first principles’ and Taylor’s notion of “our over-all take on human life, and its cosmic and (if any) spiritual surroundings.” As he explains, “our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it. It is something in the nature of a hunch; perhaps we might better speak here of ‘anticipatory confidence’.”

⁴⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro Vita sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*, (ed.) Martin Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 219.

opinion;” that since “religion is so personal a peculiarity and so private a possession, we must of necessity ignore it in the intercourse of man with man;” that “it is as impertinent to think about a man’s religion as about his sources of income or his management of his family;” and that “religion is in no sense the bond of society.”⁴⁶

The latter conviction, namely, that religion could not contribute to social cohesion, was now so widespread and so uncontested, Newman predicted, that by the end of the nineteenth century, it would be regarded as self-evident. Henceforth, nations would seek to socialize their citizens by means of “a universal and a thoroughly secular education, calculated to bring home to every individual that to be orderly, industrious, and sober, is his personal interest.”⁴⁷

Religion’s place would henceforth be taken by “broad fundamental ethical truths, [such as] justice, benevolence, veracity, and the like; proved experience; and those natural laws which exist and act spontaneously in society, and in social matters, whether physical or psychological; for instance, in government, trade, finance, sanitary experiments, and the intercourse of nations.” In such a context, religion would be regarded as “a private luxury, which a man may have if he will; but which of course he must pay for, and which he must not obtrude upon others, or indulge in to their annoyance.”⁴⁸

Newman acknowledged that the movement to ‘unbelief’ manifested itself differently depending on the local context, and that what we today describe as growing religious pluralism seemed to necessitate a weakening of religion’s power within the state. Moreover, he recognized that the wellsprings of this movement were not unambiguous, that it was inspired by the most noble principles, including “the precepts of justice, truthfulness, sobriety, self-command, [and] benevolence,” and that it accorded with “the natural laws which exist and act spontaneously in society.”⁴⁹ The great deficiency of the movement, Newman declared, was its tendency to eliminate religion altogether as a social force. When this was the case, it must be resisted. As he put it, “It is not till we find that this array of principles is intended to supersede, to block out, religion, that we pronounce it to be evil.”⁵⁰

Of course, since Newman’s day the movement to ‘block out’ religion has acquired force and, in some places, has even enjoyed the

⁴⁶ John Henry Newman, *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with His Replies – 1879-81*, (ed.) W. P. Neville (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905), pp. 65-67.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ *Idem.*, p. 66.

⁵⁰ *Idem.*, p. 68.

support of modern nation states. However, the failure of militant atheism has not meant that religion is uncontested, and Newman's real concern was not, in any case, such brutish onslaughts. It was instead the undermining of religion by a gradual process that was at once moral, intellectual and 'imaginative', and therefore essentially 'social', that is to say, self-evident, in the way in which one's culture and its grounding presuppositions are always self-evident. Newman would perhaps have recognized the 'array of principles' which gave him most cause for concern in the writings of those contemporary advocates of secularism who claim that their view of the world, namely, that it is "to be understood and explained – as far as it is possible to explain it – in natural terms; [and that] it works always and everywhere without miracles or supernatural interventions," must not be construed as a "denial of the world of spirit and of religion, but [as] an affirmation of the world we're living in now." According to this view of things, the "provinces which...secularity has a powerful right to reclaim" include "the most important provinces claimed by religion – the provinces of ethics and art and daily life."⁵¹

This, of course, begs the question of what precisely constitutes religion. However, from a Newmanian perspective, it is a *petitio principii* which, in its invocation of 'ethics', opens the door to dialogue since it is there, above all, that Newman roots the religious impulse. The significance of the ethical, and its implications for the future of religion and the religiously minded subject in a secular age, will be addressed in the following section.

Newman, the Inward Turn, and the Quest for Authenticity

Just as there is much in Newman's thought which resonates with Taylor's analysis of secularity, there is much (and perhaps even much more) that resonates with Taylor's notion of authenticity.

It is basic to Newman's theological anthropology that the human subject is "emphatically self-made," and charged with the task of "completing his inchoate and rudimental nature, and of developing his

⁵¹ George Levine, "Introduction," *The Joy of Secularism: 11 Essays for How We Live Now* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 1. While one of the aims of the *Joy of Secularism* is to contribute to "a 'positive' secularity that might satisfy those crucially important feelings and spiritual needs that it would be self-destructive and self-deceptive for secularists simply to deny," its achievement "absolutely must mean *displacing* traditional religion from areas properly and significantly belonging to the secular world," and the 'repudiation' of "the supernatural" [emphasis Levine]. The "provinces which...secularity has a powerful right to reclaim" include "the most important provinces claimed by religion – the provinces of ethics and art and daily life" (pp. 11, 20). Of course, in Newman's view, religion has its deepest roots in ethics.

own perfection out of the living elements with which his mind began to be.”⁵² So Newman could write that, “...Being is not known directly, but indirectly through its states,”⁵³ i.e. through its manifestation in particular “operations” of the ‘mind’. Among those “primary conditions of the mind which are involved in the fact of existence,” Newman included “not only memory, sensation, [and] reasoning, but also conscience.”⁵⁴ Hence, for Newman, it is as legitimate to say ‘Conscientiam habeo, ergo sum’ or even ‘Sentio, ergo sum’ as it is to say ‘Cogito, ergo sum’.⁵⁵ In all these formulations, however, the linking ‘ergo’ is the product of a post-factum analysis of what is originally “one complex act of intuition,” in which the ‘apprehension’ and the ‘judgment’ are simultaneous.⁵⁶

Newman acknowledged that his claim on behalf of conscience, namely, that ‘it has a legitimate place among our mental acts,’ or ‘that we have by nature a conscience,’ constituted an unproved ‘assumption’, a ‘first principle,’ the rejection of which made further discussion meaningless.⁵⁷ It was Newman’s view that, to think at all, one must be possessed of at least some ‘opinions which are held without proof,’ and these are rightly called ‘first principles.’

If you trace back your reasons for holding an opinion, you must stop somewhere; the process cannot go on forever; you must come at last to something you cannot prove, else life

⁵² Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 225.

⁵³ John Henry Newman, *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, ed. Edward Sillem, 2 vols. (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1969–1970), 2:43. See also 2:33–34.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*, 2:43. See also 2:35 where Newman writes as follows: “Certain faculties then, or rather their operations, are a part of the initial idea of existence.”

⁵⁵ *Idem.*, 2:33: “Consciousness indeed is not of simple being, but of action or passion, of which pain is one form. I am conscious that I am, because I am conscious I am thinking (cogito ergo sum) or feeling, or remembering, or comparing, or exercising discourse.” See also 2:35, 37, 41, 45, 63, 69, 73, 83.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*, 2:71; see also 2:33, 43, 45, 63, 83. Newman’s views on consciousness, and conscience as a dimension of consciousness, are captured in Bernard Lonergan’s understanding of consciousness as a set of “operations” which are, so to speak, simply given. Fred Lawrence, “The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), p. 83, points out that, for Lonergan, the operations of consciousness need to be “focused upon, explicitated, and thematized” for them to become “knowledge in the proper sense of the term.” As Lawrence explains (p. 70), this is achieved “through introspection, through inquiry and understanding and articulation, as well as through reflection and judgment.” We might say that what is required is, in Taylor’s terms, the appropriation of our “inner depths.”

⁵⁷ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 73.

would be spent in inquiring and reasoning, our minds would be ever tossing to and fro, and there would be nothing to guide us. No man alive, but has some First Principles or other.⁵⁸

Of course, for Newman the ‘inevitability’ of ‘first principles’ does not divest the individual of responsibility in regard to them. Where conscience is concerned, the implications of this principle are staggering. Not only is it one’s ‘sacred duty’ to acknowledge conscience’s legitimate place among those ‘living elements’ (or operations) with which the mind begins, the failure to do this prejudices, if it does not entirely pervert, the elaboration of a whole body of derivative principles.⁵⁹ For Newman then, the task of thinking soundly is, from the outset, a moral, as well as a practical imperative, one to be fulfilled most ‘conscientiously’ in fidelity to our lived experience.⁶⁰ In Taylor’s terms, we might say that, for Newman, the achievement of ‘selfhood’ requires the appropriation of our “inner depths.”⁶¹ The implications of that appropriation for the religious

⁵⁸ John Henry Newman, *The Present Position of Catholics in England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903), p. 279.

⁵⁹ The principle of being faithful to ‘lived experience’ is integral to Newman’s appeal to the ‘nature of things’. J.H. Walgrave explains that, for Newman, this means that we must take things as we find them, and submit ourselves to the natural order as to a divine law. By the ‘natural order of things’, Newman means things as they are *in fact*, things as they show themselves to be *historically*. See Jan H. Walgrave, *Newman the Theologian*, trans. A. V. Littledale (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1960), pp. 221-223, 228. The final arbiter in questions of judgment and action is the empirical order, i.e., “things as they are, not as you could wish them.” See John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921), p. 232.

⁶⁰ John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899), p. 279: “From what I have said, it is plain that First Principles may be false or true; indeed, this is my very point, as you will presently see. Certainly they are not necessarily true; and again, certainly there *are* ways of unlearning them when they are false: moreover, as regards moral and religious First Principles which are false, of course a Catholic considers that no one holds them except by some fault of his own...” These words date from 1851. By the time Newman came to write the *Grammar of Assent* (1870), he expressed himself much more cautiously regarding the problem of defectiveness in first principles, and recognized the possibility of inculpable error. See *Grammar of Assent*, pp. 41, 248-249, 259, 355 n. 35. The ‘decisiveness’ of Newman’s position in the 1851 lectures must be viewed in the light of the polemical character of the lectures, and his status as a convert, that is to say, his concern not to seem to call into doubt traditional thinking.

⁶¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 539-540. See also p. 9 where Taylor links the appeal to our “inner depths,” “our own deepest feelings or instincts,” to the

subject, and the light Taylor's thought throws on Newman's ruminations in this regard, will be the subject of the following section.

Newman, 'Strong Evaluations', and the Genesis of Religion

In his *Philosophical Notebook*, a collection of occasional jottings and reflections, Newman recorded his own attempts to 'explicate and thematize' the operations of his mind, and the experience of conscience in particular. There and elsewhere, he describes conscience as characterized by two indivisible, but not indistinguishable, dimensions which he described as a 'moral sense' and a 'sense of duty'. As a 'moral sense', conscience is manifest in the awareness that "there is a right and a wrong," which is not, of course, the same as knowing, in a particular instance, what is right or wrong. As a 'sense of duty,' conscience is manifest as a "keen sense of obligation and responsibility," namely, to do good and avoid evil, which, again, is not the same as knowing, in a particular instance, precisely what is good and what is evil.⁶² Newman speaks of these two dimensions of conscience, respectively, as "a rule of right conduct," and "a sanction of right conduct."⁶³

It is peculiar to conscience that it "has an intimate bearing on our affections and emotions." Indeed, in Newman's view, conscience "is always emotional." Hence, he sometimes speaks quite simply of "the *feeling* [our emphasis] of conscience" to describe its operation. Newman describes this feeling as "a certain keen sensibility, pleasant or painful – self-approval and hope, or compunction and fear" which follows upon the performance of certain actions.⁶⁴

For Newman, the feelings generated by conscience are possessed of profound (theological) significance. They serve to imprint upon the mind and the imagination the realization that we are – and are called to become – 'responsible' beings, and that this responsibility extends to others and, ultimately, to a transcendent 'Other' whose presence we can, as it were, 'intuit' in and through the complex, and always emotive, experience of conscience.⁶⁵

Romantic critique of "disengaged reason" which sets "thinking in opposition to feeling or instinct or intuition." See also pp. 344, 539-540.

⁶² Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 74; see also p. 73. See also Newman, *Philosophical Notebook*, 2:49.

⁶³ Idem., p. 74.

⁶⁴ Idem., p. 73.

⁶⁵ Idem., p. 76: "Inanimate things cannot stir our affections; these are correlative persons. If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear. If, on doing wrong, we feel the same tearful, broken-hearted sorrow

Hans Joas has captured something of Newman's understanding of the emotions attendant on our ethical dilemmas, that is to say, the moments when we are called upon to choose or to act, when he speaks of values as "emotionally laden ideas of the desirable."⁶⁶ As Joas says elsewhere, "our feelings, despite their need for interpretation, are not completely absorbed into our self-interpretations."⁶⁷ We are able to stand back from them, as it were, and to reflect on what they tell us about ourselves. We are able to engage in what Taylor describes as a process of "strong evaluation", i.e., a consideration of the "quality of our motivation" or, more accurately, of "the qualitative worth of different desires."⁶⁸ And the key to that qualitative evaluation is our feelings or emotions. Assessing the latter means "making explicit a judgment about the object they bear on."⁶⁹

Feelings, then, are indicators of the "import" of the situation in which we find ourselves.⁷⁰ "The import gives the grounds or basis for the feeling."⁷¹ Taylor is very insistent about the priority of import above feeling. As he puts it, "the relation is not one of simple equivalence, where feeling the emotion is ascribing the import." Rather, "experiencing the emotion is experiencing our situation as bearing a certain import."⁷² And

which overwhelms us on hurting a mother; if, on doing right, we enjoy the same sunny serenity of mind, the same soothing, satisfactory delight which follows on our receiving praise from a father, we certainly have within us the image of some person, to whom our love and veneration look, in whose smile we find our happiness, for whom we yearn, towards whom we direct our pleadings, in whose anger we are troubled and waste away." See also John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford*, ed. Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 80-81.

⁶⁶ Hans Joas, *Do We Need Religion? On the Experience of Self-Transcendence* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), p. 29. The German original reads as follows: "Werte sind nicht langfristige Präferenzen höherer Ordnung, sondern reflexive Standards zur Bewertung unserer Präferenzen, emotional besetzte Vorstellungen über das Wünschenswerte und nicht Wünsche." See Hans Joas, *Braucht der Mensch Religion? Über Erfahrungen der Selbsttranszendenz* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Joas, *Do We Need Religion?*, p. 46.

⁶⁸ See Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 16. See also pp. 19, 66-67.

⁶⁹ Idem., p. 47.

⁷⁰ Idem., p. 48: "By 'import' I mean a way in which something can be relevant or of importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations or feelings of a subject; or otherwise put, a property of something whereby it is matter of non-indifference to a subject."

⁷¹ Idem., p. 49.

⁷² Idem., p. 50. See also p. 51: "...Imports are quite essentially experience-dependent, or appear to be."

that import, Taylor insists, is not merely “contingent.” It is “deeper,”⁷³ and touches on our understanding of our selfhood, that is to say, our status as a “responsible human agent.”⁷⁴

“Our identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations,” that is to say, by our “understanding of the imports which impinge on” us.⁷⁵ These constitute “articulations of our sense of what is worthy, or higher, or more integrated, or more fulfilling, and so on.”⁷⁶ They are declarations “about the quality of life, [about] the kind of beings we are or want to be.” For Taylor, it is evident that “the strong evaluator has articulacy and depth which the simple weigher lacks.”⁷⁷ In short, the strong evaluator, Newman’s ‘conscientious’ person, is an ‘agent with depth’.⁷⁸ This is, for Taylor – and for Newman – nowhere more evident than in the experience of “moral obligation,” which Taylor illustrates by means of “the kind of experience of the man who sees the victim lying in the road and feels called upon to help.” In such a case, Taylor claims, “the sense of being called on, quite distinct from desiring to help... depends on a sense of the subject as a moral agent.” The attendant emotions, such as, for example, “*Achtung* before the moral law,” require that we have “some idea of different dimensions in ourselves as subjects, that as moral subjects we have demands which are incomparable with those of desire.”⁷⁹

In short, our emotional life “incorporates a sense of what is really important to [us], of the shape of [our] aspirations, which asks to be understood...” “To be human,” Taylor asserts, “is to be already engaged in living an answer” to the question posed by our capacity for strong evaluation,⁸⁰ “to exist in a space defined by distinctions of worth.” In other words, a subject, in the fullest sense, is “an agent who has a sense of self, of his/her own life, who can evaluate it, and make choices about it.”⁸¹

⁷³ *Idem.*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*, p. 15. See also pp. 21, 28-29, 34, 42-43, 60, 62-63, 64-65. See p. 55: “...To ascribe an import is to make a judgment about the way things are, which cannot simply be reduced to the way we feel about them...” See also p. 107.

⁷⁵ *Idem.*, pp. 34, 72.

⁷⁶ *Idem.*, p. 35.

⁷⁷ *Idem.*, p. 26.

⁷⁸ *Idem.*, p. 29.

⁷⁹ *Idem.*, p. 73.

⁸⁰ *Idem.*, p. 75; see also pp. 100-101 where Taylor speaks of the “inner connection of feeling and judgment” as being “attested in the fact that we speak...of ‘irrational’ emotion; and that we define and distinguish the feelings by the type of situation.”

⁸¹ *Idem.*, p. 103. See also p. 3: “...To be full human agent, to be person or a self in the ordinary meaning, is to exist in a space defined by distinctions of worth.

This, it can be argued, is more or less what Newman was moving towards when he reflected on the experience of conscience and concluded that its most distinctive feature, in contrast to our “sense of the beautiful”, is that “it is always emotional.” Hence, he concludes, the experience of conscience “implies what [the sense of the beautiful] only sometimes implies; that it always involves the recognition of a living object, towards which it is directed.”⁸²

These feelings in us are such as require for their exciting cause an intelligent being: we are not affectionate towards a stone, nor do we feel shame before a horse or a dog; we have no remorse or compunction on breaking mere human law: Yet, so it is, conscience excites all these painful emotions, confusion, foreboding, self-condemnation; and on the other hand it sheds upon us a deep peace, a sense of security, a resignation, and a hope, which there is no sensible, no earthly object to elicit....If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the Object to which his perception is directed must be Supernatural and Divine; and thus the phenomena of Conscience, as a dictate, avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor, a Judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive, and is the creative principle of religion, as the Moral Sense is the principle of ethics.⁸³

Religion here, or “natural religion” as Newman preferred to call it, is that living relationship between the believer and a personal God, born out of the experience of conscience, which comes to expression in stories and myths (narrative), rituals and devotions (spirituality), and codes of conduct (ethics).⁸⁴

A self is a being for whom certain questions of categoric value have arisen, and received at least partial answers.”

⁸² Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 73.

⁸³ Idem., p. 76. Newman’s notion of conscience providing us with a “picture” of God is linked to his understanding of the role of the religious imagination. See Terrence Merrigan, “Imagination and Religion: The Case of John Henry Newman,” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 70 (2009): 187-217. See Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 102: “To be a moral agent is to be sensitive to certain standards. But ‘sensitive’ here must have a strong sense: not just that one’s behavior follow a certain standard, but also that one in some sense recognize or acknowledge the standard.”

⁸⁴ See, in this regard, Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 251: “By religion I mean the knowledge of God, of His Will, and of our duties towards Him; and there are three main channels which Nature furnishes for our acquiring this knowledge,

Newman acknowledged that, at least initially (and this remains the case if one's education and religious practice do not contribute to a "filling out" of one's emergent image of God), the individual experiences Him primarily as "Lawgiver" and "Judge."⁸⁵ Newman acknowledges that 'natural religion' "has almost invariably worn its dark side outwards," and "is founded in one way or other on the sense of sin."⁸⁶ Indeed, he declares that the "religion of barbarism" is the most authentic expression of natural religion. That being said, natural religion also "reveals" the divine as One who wills our happiness and has ordered creation accordingly. From the outset then, the individual looks to the divine lawgiver disclosed in conscience as to a benevolent ruler, who has one's best interests at heart.⁸⁷ Hence, unlike Max Scheler or Albert Schweitzer, or Sigmund Freud and others, Newman does not reduce the experience of conscience to that of 'bad conscience'. Instead, he views it as a dialectical relationship between 'good' and 'bad'.⁸⁸ This tensile experience issues in two major characteristics of 'natural religion', namely, prayer and hope, with the former serving as the vehicle par excellence for the expression of the latter.⁸⁹

The hope of which Newman speaks is perhaps best described as an irrepressible existential longing or perhaps even anticipation that the One who calls us to perfection will come to our aid.⁹⁰ So it is that the

viz. our own minds, the voice of mankind, and the course of the world, that is, of human life and human affairs.... And the most authoritative of these three means of knowledge, as being specially our own, is our own mind...." Newman continues by declaring that, "Our great internal teacher of religion is... our conscience."

⁸⁵ Idem., pp. 79-80: "Whether its elements [i.e., the elements of the image of God that might be imprinted on the imagination], latent in the mind, would ever be elicited without extrinsic help is very doubtful;...[T]he image of God, if duly cherished, may expand, deepen, and be completed, with the growth of [the subject's] powers and in the course of life...by means of education, social intercourse, experience, and literature."

⁸⁶ Idem., pp. 252-253.

⁸⁷ Idem., pp. 113-114. See also Terrence Merrigan, "'One Momentous Doctrine which Enters into my Reasoning': The Unitive Function of Newman's Doctrine of Providence," *Downside Review* 108 (1990): 254-281.

⁸⁸ J. H. Walgrave, "Newman's leer over het geweten," *Selected Writings – Thematische Geschriften* (Leuven: Peeters, 1982), p. 195. For a more detailed discussion of Newman's views in the light of various critiques, see Terrence Merrigan, "Conscience and Selfhood: Thomas More, John Henry Newman, and the Crisis of the Postmodern Subject," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 841-869. See also John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 93-112.

⁸⁹ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, pp. 258-260.

⁹⁰ Idem., pp. 270-272. "One of the most important effects of Natural Religion on the mind, in preparation for Revealed, is the anticipation which it creates, that a

expectation of a revelation, that is to say, of some initiative on the part of the divine, emerges, for Newman, as an “integral part of Natural Religion.”⁹¹ “This presentiment,” he goes on, “is founded on our sense, on the one hand, of the infinite goodness of God, and, on the other, of our own extreme misery and need – two doctrines which are the primary constituents of Natural Religion.”⁹² The naturally religious person, then, is, as it were, “on the lookout” for God. He may well qualify as a seeker or a dweller, or perhaps even a tinkerer. What, according to Newman, are the prospects for his subsequent religious development? It is in the consideration of this question that Newman proves less sanguine than many contemporary theorists about the future of the ‘naturally’ religious subject.

NEWMAN AND THE EXILE OF THE RELIGIOUS SUBJECT IN A SECULAR AGE

The Inward Turn and the First Exile

In his consideration of the relationship between ‘natural’ and ‘revealed’ religion, Newman mixes historical analysis and what would now be described as a ‘phenomenological’ investigation of his own personal experience. Moreover, he never clearly distinguishes these. As Lee H. Yearley has pointed out, Newman’s reflections on the history of religions evidence a Victorian provincialism, and his endeavour to establish an historical or ‘chronological’ connection between natural and revealed religion involves him in serious theological and historical problems.⁹³

However, as Yearley himself acknowledges, these problems do not detract from Newman’s real achievement. Newman’s concern was not the historical progress of religion (though he was, of course, intrigued by this problematic) but the religious progress of concrete, historical individuals, most of whom had been exposed to Christianity from infancy and many of whom (including his own brother) had rejected it, or threatened to reject it, as untenable. Seen in this light, Newman’s ruminations on the future of the

Revelation will be given. That earnest desire of it, which religious minds cherish, leads the way to the expectation of it.”

⁹¹ Idem., pp. 260-261.

⁹² Idem., p. 272. See also John Henry Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, (ed.) James Tolhurst (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), pp. 277-279.

⁹³ Regarding Newman’s phenomenological approach, see, for example his *Philosophical Notebook*, 1:127-139; see also Lee H. Yearley, *The Ideas of Newman: Christianity and Human Religiosity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), pp. 4-9, 20, 35-37.

naturally religious subject might serve to illuminate the future of today's dwellers, seekers and tinkerers.

While it would be facile to simply equate Newman's 'natural religion' with the contemporary 'spiritual quest', there are grounds for comparison. Both are characterized by a concern with inwardness; both launch the subject on a quest for the source or goal of the religious or spiritual yearning that has (somehow or other) been awakened; both find expression in visible practices;⁹⁴ and both are essentially open-ended.

Drawing upon the categories developed by Taylor, we might say that both Newman's 'natural religion' and Wuthnow's practice-oriented spirituality offer the possibility of a rupture of the "immanent frame," that is to say, the self-enclosed space generated by the secular culture whose advent Newman predicted and whose contours Taylor has delineated. In other words, both allow for some – however fragile – recovery of transcendence in the midst of our secular age, the former by a 'fuller' appropriation of the inward turn through the discovery of God through conscience, and the latter by the renewed (and adapted) appropriation of established traditions of spiritual practice.

That being said, Newman was, in fact, pessimistic about the sustainability, or at least the long-term viability, of the religious quest that finds expression in natural religion.

On a number of occasions throughout his life, Newman reflected on the threat to so-called 'natural religion'. So, for example, he spoke of conscience's lack of a sanction, beyond itself, for its elevated claims about the Moral Governor and Judge. These are therefore prey to societal pressures and to the individual's own inclination to abandon the moral ideal as impracticable. Elsewhere, he claimed the obscurity of the object of one's religious instincts and aspirations, that is, the dearth of information about God's 'personality', tends to sap one's moral resolve and raises the spectre of the futility of the moral and religious enterprise. On other occasions, he maintained that the sense of one's culpability and one's incapacity to realize the moral ideal disclosed in conscience exposes natural religion's inherent insufficiency.⁹⁵

Newman's 'naturally' religious subject, then, finds himself in 'no-man's-land'. He is, so to speak, an 'exile', no longer at home in the world

⁹⁴ See Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. vii: "Spirituality consists not only of implicit assumptions about life but also of the things people talk about and the things they do: the stories they construct about their spiritual journeys, the prayers they offer, the inspirational books they read, the time they spend meditating, their participation in retreats and at worship services, the conversations they have about it with their friends, and the energy they spend thinking about it."

⁹⁵ For a discussion of Newman's reflections on the threats to natural religion, see Merrigan, "One Momentous Doctrine," pp. 264-269.

and no longer secure in himself, threatened by the cold (secular) world without and unsettled by the fragility of the (spiritual) world within. Not surprisingly, Newman was of the view that such a person, left to his own devices, will ultimately give ear to the siren song of the world.⁹⁶ This conviction puts Newman at loggerheads with the claim, discussed earlier, that the contemporary 'subjective turn' in religion comes down to "a spectrum between two poles," namely, "individuated subjectivism" and "relational subjectivism."⁹⁷ From a Newmanian perspective, there is little if any guarantee that 'relational subjectivism' will prevail, especially if communal religious life continues to decline. In this regard, one recalls Steve Bruce's rather strident claim that "shared belief systems require coercion, that...[t]he survival of religion requires that individuals be subordinated to the community," and that, "in the stable affluent democracies of the Western world, the individual asserts the rights of the sovereign autonomous consumer." The upshot of this is that individuals "claim the same right in delineating the supernatural" as they do in choosing their electronic goods. Hence, Bruce concludes that, "when the common culture of a society consists of operating principles that allow the individual to choose, no amount of vague spiritual yearning will generate a shared belief system."⁹⁸ For Bruce, it would seem that the default position, once 'shared belief systems' have collapsed, is indeed a "vague spiritual yearning."

Newman's ruminations on the fragility of natural religion find something of an echo in Wuthnow's caveats regarding "inward-looking spirituality" of the seeker type. Such spirituality may well generate a "withdrawal from public life and...seeming apathy toward social problems."⁹⁹ Moreover, the attention to daily life and the focus on

⁹⁶ Taylor offers what might be construed as an interesting reflection on the 'world' in *A Secular Age*, pp. 483-484 when he reflects on consumer culture and its construction of "spaces of mutual display" which only serve to "relate us to prestigious centers of style-creation, usually in rich and powerful nations and milieux." This culture, however, can never serve as a vehicle for the "declaration of real individual autonomy." See also Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 66 where Trilling refers to David Riesman's notion of the "'other-directed' personality... [whose] whole being is attuned to catch the signals sent out by the consensus of his fellows and by the institutional agencies of the culture, to the extent that he is scarcely a self at all, but, rather, a reiterated impersonation."

⁹⁷ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 10, 13. See also pp. 125-126, 149; see Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Steve Bruce, "The Social Process of Secularization," in Richard K. Fenn (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 262.

⁹⁹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 151.

“ordinary objects and events” may encourage the seeker to simply “reaffirm the status quo rather than challenging people to improve their lives or even to entertain hopes that life can be better than it is.”¹⁰⁰ Inward-looking spirituality may also issue “in a transient spiritual existence characterized more often by dabbling than depth,”¹⁰¹ an approach that is often accompanied by “a facile view of tradition, diminishing its importance in the interest of being unencumbered when one desires to move on.”¹⁰²

For Wuthnow, then, no less than for Newman, it would seem that the future, for the religious subject left to himself, is rather bleak, and the need for community makes itself felt.

The Inhospitability of the Secular World and the Second Exile

For Newman, the only adequate complement to ‘natural religion’ is ‘revealed’ religion, which is to say, “the doctrine taught in the Mosaic and Christian dispensation, and contained in the Holy Scriptures,” which does not supplant, but builds on, nature’s authentic teaching.¹⁰³ More particularly, Newman insisted that the Church was in fact “the undaunted and the only defender” of those “truths, which the natural heart admits in their substance, though it cannot maintain, – the being of a God, the certainty of future retribution, the claims of the moral law, the reality of sin, [and] the hope of supernatural help.”¹⁰⁴ The Church is the champion of conscience, a visible body empowered to break the overwhelming grip of the ‘world’ on those who seek to follow the lead of the voice speaking from within. Newman’s vision of the integral unity between natural and revealed religion led Erich Przywara to describe him as “the great synthesizer of interiority and the Church.”¹⁰⁵ This is not to suggest that Newman was naïve about the inevitable conflicts between the claims of conscience and the demands of authority. It is instead a comment on the mutuality between the religious subject and communitarian religion

¹⁰⁰ Idem., p. 164.

¹⁰¹ Idem., p. 168.

¹⁰² Idem., p. 191.

¹⁰³ John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1918), p. 79. See also Terrence Merrigan, “Revelation,” *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 47-72; Merrigan, “One Momentous Doctrine,” pp. 265-266.

¹⁰⁴ Newman, *Idea of a University*, p. 516.

¹⁰⁵ Erich Przywara, “Newman: Möglicher Heiliger und Kirchenlehrer und Kirchenlehrer der neuen Zeit?,” *Newman Studien* (Nürnberg: Glock und Lutz, 1957) 3:31

which must obtain if the religious impulse is to be preserved and nourished.

Here, too, Wuthnow's reflections on contemporary religious practice resonate with Newman's nineteenth-century insights. Practice-oriented spirituality promotes what Wuthnow, in words reminiscent of Taylor, describes as "a self-interpretive process,"¹⁰⁶ a process not unlike the appropriation of self undertaken by Newman's 'conscientious' religious subject. In contrast to seeker spirituality, practice-oriented spirituality is no longer restricted to determining "who one is," but also requires one to engage in reflection on one's appropriation of experience.¹⁰⁷ This may promote an interest in the stories of others, of fellow practitioners and their narrative traditions. As Wuthnow notes, practitioners "emphasize the value of rooting their practice in a specific *tradition*," and thereby (at least implicitly) acknowledge their debt to those who have "extended the reach of the practice to its present point."¹⁰⁸ The reliance on established techniques and venerable traditions means that practice-oriented spirituality is "inevitably a conversation with the past," and therefore also "social," even for those who do not attach themselves to particular religious bodies.¹⁰⁹ In this way, a vital dimension of dwelling-oriented spirituality might be recovered.

Wuthnow sees an opening here for established religious institutions which are willing to provide resources and encouragement to the practice-oriented.¹¹⁰ The future of the churches may well depend on their willingness – and their ability – to do precisely that. This is, of course, a major challenge for institutions which, in Taylor's words, "are passing from the status of actual or at least historical establishment, as the default church of the majority, to a condition more like fragments of a diaspora."¹¹¹

Taylor's invocation of the notion of the 'diaspora' is intriguing but, from a Newmanian perspective, the biblical notion of 'exile' would seem to do more justice to the condition in which the Church – and especially the modern religious subject – find themselves. The terms 'diaspora' and 'exile' are not mere synonyms. The biblical understanding of 'exile' (the

¹⁰⁶ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁷ *Idem.*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Practice," p. 317. The reference to those who have "extended the reach of the practice to its present point" is part of a larger citation from Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Virtue*, 2nd ed., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 194.

¹⁰⁹ Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Practice," p. 317.

¹¹⁰ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 184.

¹¹¹ Taylor, "The Church Speaks – To Whom," p. 23; see also Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Mapping the Contemporary Forms of Catholic Religiosity," *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, pp. 32-33.

Hebrew term is *galut*), “suggests anguish, forced homelessness, and the sense of things being not as they should be,” while diaspora, “although it suggests absence from some center – political or religious or cultural – does not connote anything so hauntingly negative.”¹¹² Exile is “a religious, or almost religious, notion”, evoking the sense of “dislocation, a sense of being uprooted, being somehow in the wrong place.”¹¹³

For European Catholics particularly, living amidst the ‘remains’ of Christendom and regularly seeing portions of its historical patrimony (‘deconsecrated’ churches, ‘religious’ art, and ecclesiastical property, etc.) ‘returned’, quite literally, to the ‘world’, there is a profound sense of (religious) estrangement from the prevailing culture, a culture in which even the interest in ‘practice-oriented spirituality’ is at best a minority concern. This is a context in which the British sociologist of religion, Grace Davie, could declare that the challenge facing Europe, especially in the light of the contested presence of new religious movements, is “to create and to sustain a truly tolerant and pluralist society... a society which goes well beyond an individualized live-and-let-live philosophy; a society able to accommodate ‘that unusual phenomenon’ in contemporary Europe, the person (of whatever faith) who takes religion seriously.”¹¹⁴

The sense that one is largely or often alone “in taking faith seriously,” a sense reinforced by the increasing marginalization of European religion and the self-evident character of the secularist ‘take’ on human destiny, exacerbates the experience of exile engendered by the inward turn. Newman captured this experience in one of the most poignant passages in his *Apologia pro Vita sua*:

Starting then with the being of a God, (which, as I have said, is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction,) I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full; and

¹¹² See “Introduction,” *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 2. See also Erich S. Gruen, “Diaspora and Homeland,” *Diasporas and Exiles*, p. 18, who speaks of exile as “a bitter and doleful image, offering a bleak vision that issues either in despair or in a remote reverie of restoration.”

¹¹³ Howard Wettstein, “Coming to Terms with Exile,” *Diasporas and Exiles*, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 14. Davie refers to O. Leaman, “Taking Religion Seriously,” *The Times*, 6 February (1989), p. 18.

the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator. This is, to me, one of those great difficulties of this absolute primary truth, to which I referred just now. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world.¹¹⁵

As we have already seen, Newman looked to the Church to come to the aid of the religious exile. What Newman would have made of the Church's response to contemporary challenges can, of course, only be a matter for speculation and appeals to his authority have come from both sides of the ideological divide that has opened up in contemporary Catholicism.¹¹⁶ A number of things are clear, however.

The first is that Newman would have acknowledged and understood the appeal to inwardness (and the self) that is characteristic of modernity. The second is that he offers an original perspective on the religious potential of the 'inward turn' through his reflection on conscience, a reflection which is enriched by Taylor's analysis of the value-laden character of feelings.¹¹⁷ The third is that Newman would have been sceptical about the potential of seeker-oriented spirituality to generate religious depth and promote communitarian religion. The fourth is that, from a Newmanian perspective, the quest of the committed religious subject will be characterized by a dynamic orientation towards the 'otherness' represented by revelatory traditions and communitarian forms of religion.¹¹⁸ The fifth is that, from a Newmanian perspective, the life of

¹¹⁵ Newman, *Apologia pro Vita sua*, pp. 216-217.

¹¹⁶ Terrence Merrigan, "Newman and Theological Liberalism," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), pp. 605-621.

¹¹⁷ Newman's theocentric understanding of conscience, supplemented by Taylor's analysis of feeling, might serve as the beginning of an answer to Taylor's question: "[W]hat ontology do we need to make sense of our ethical or moral lives, properly understood?" See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 608-609. This combination would certainly hold together the two elements of Taylor's definition of "religious faith in a strong sense," namely, "the belief in transcendent reality, on one hand, and the connected aspiration to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other." See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 510.

¹¹⁸ On this reading of things, 'religious solipsism', so to speak, is perhaps best seen as an indicator of spiritual immaturity.

the committed religious subject will inevitably involve a twofold experience of 'exile', understood as a trial, namely, (i) a nagging sense that our age (and indeed all ages) are 'out of joint', and (ii) a profound awareness that the religious subject himself is somehow party to the experience of dislocation. The sixth is that the Church, if she is to be effective in meeting the needs of today's seekers, dwellers and tinkerers, must endeavour to tap into, and engage with, their spiritual aspirations and to allow itself to be challenged by them. It is only by doing so that it can begin to overcome its own (sometimes self-imposed) exile from the people it is called to serve.

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CHAPTER VII

EXPLORING PUBLIC LIFE AS A SACRAMENT: ON DIVINE PROMISE IN A WORLD OF SEEKERS

STEPHAN VAN ERP

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, public life will be explored as a sacramental practice in order to construct a theological framework that could serve as a proposal for reconsidering the relationship between Church and the secular, and between the so-called ‘dwellers’ and ‘seekers’. Contemporary political and public theologies offer several starting points for viewing public life as a sacrament. In the Church, the concrete sacraments are considered signs and instruments of God’s presence in the world at significant moments in people’s lives. Theologically, they are viewed as distinctive forms and utterances that make the whole of human history visible as a sacrament of salvation. The Flemish theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) suggested that the presence of God’s salvation is not limited to the Church alone, but encompasses the whole of human history up to the present.¹ This theological vision could offer opportunities for further explorations into ways of viewing public life as being sacramental.

There are important differences however between Church and public life, which raise questions that need careful consideration, if only to avoid the suggestion that the Church can be found everywhere. If sacraments are signs and instruments that call for the explicit witnessing and practice of faith, how then could the world of seekers become an instrument of salvation, if in it neither witnessing nor any other recognizable utterance of faith can be heard? If the main characteristic of a sacrament is the God-human encounter, how can we discern that encounter in public life? For the Church, it raises questions too: If such a God-human encounter could be perceived in the here and now of public life, as Schillebeeckx seems to have suggested, then what is the distinctive significance of the Church’s mediating and embodying God’s salvific work in Jesus Christ? How can the Church view public life as sacramental without disregarding the significance of Christ as the primordial

¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Collected Works* [11 Volumes] (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), Vol. X.

sacrament, or the particular and distinctive function of the ecclesial sacraments?

This chapter is divided into four parts. First, I will account for the explicit *theological* strategy I have set out for the rest of the chapter, and explain why theology has a different approach than that which follows from the sociological logic of disjunction. Second, I will explore the recent attempts to reconnect theology and secular culture under the heading of ‘public theology’ and show how these attempts have failed to maintain a theological position. Which strategies has public theology developed to speak theologically about public life? What have been the consequences of these strategies for the way public theologians viewed the secular? I will claim that public theology had to construct a clear disjunction between the Church and the public, in order to account for its self-declared bridge-building tasks. Third, I will describe how Catholic theology in the twentieth century, most notably *nouvelle théologie*, provides a different ontology that allows for a less disjunctive representation of the relationship between the Church and the secular, offering an account of how and why dwellers and seekers are inhabiting the same space. This however, poses the question whether nowadays such an ontology is a convincing account of reality that could provide a possible appeal of the Church to the seekers. The sacramental ontology of twentieth century Catholic theology might need to be complemented by reflections on the responsive act of faith this ontology calls for. Fourth and finally, I will propose that public life – both in its secular and religious forms – could itself be regarded as a sacramental practice of response or witnessing. This sacramental view will offer new opportunities for understanding how the Church becomes Church in that practice, and how the world of seekers can be viewed as already participating in that becoming.

MAINTAINING THE DIFFERENCE: SHOULD THEOLOGY OVERCOME DISJUNCTION?

How to overcome the disjunction between the Catholic Church and the world of the so-called religious ‘seekers’? What could be the appeal of a Catholic minority Church in parts of the world which are dominated by seekers rather than by church dwellers? These questions that are at the heart of this volume could be considered the starting points of the construction of a new apologetics aiming for a positive response to the appeal of the Catholic Church. They could also be understood as part of the search to analyze the challenges and consequences of being a marginal yet distinctive movement in a religiously plural or so called ‘liquid

society'.² Or, in a more missionary fashion, they could be seen as a call for reflections on how to intensify the social or liturgical presence of the Church in the public sphere. This chapter offers a contribution to the exploration of these questions from a theological perspective. From that particular perspective, it is not self-evident that the disjunction between a Church of dwellers and the world of seekers necessarily needs to or could be overcome, because there might be a clear difference between the world views of seekers and the faith of dwellers, which is there for all the right reasons. From the perspective of the field of theology, it could be argued that theology should maintain its critical and analytical functions and that its tasks are in principle far more modest than propagating the appeal of the Church to a world of seekers.³ Furthermore, if the disjunction should be seen as more than merely a sociological construct, then there might be good reasons for the views or behavior that have caused the disjunction from the side of the seekers and others. In that case, it might be necessary that theology magnifies the disjunction, if only to show its understanding and respect of these good reasons of others, and in order to argue against them, if needed. Paradoxically, facilitating a conversation about a clear disagreement might have the positive side effect of heightening the appeal of the Church, as for example neo-orthodox strategies seem to suggest.⁴

To engage with the world views of seekers, theologians would want to decide whether these world views should be regarded a source for theology or not. Traditionally, theologians implement a variety of sources like for example the *sensus fidelium*,⁵ which theology depends on, "because the faith that they explore and explain lives in the people of God".⁶ Also, adding the sense of unbaptized seekers to the *loci theologici* does not self-evidently fit the Church's definition of 'the people of God', nor does it match the criteria for the laity as it is described in *Lumen Gentium*, the constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council:

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful they show universal agreement

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

³ International Theological Commission, *Theology Today. Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, 2012, par. 82-85.

⁴ Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship. Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁵ International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 2014.

⁶ International Theological Commission, *Theology Today*, par. 35.

in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accept that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God.⁷

For obvious reasons, the world of unbaptized seekers could not be easily regarded as a body under the guidance of the magisterium, at least not after serious further, critical reflection. The magisterium however could see it as its task to search for an understanding of whether and how the word of God can be heard in a secular world and in the seeker's utterances. In modern Catholic theology, this task has generally been performed by fundamental theology, the theological sub discipline that in the first of its traditional treatises, the *demonstratio religiosa*, engaged in discussions with criticism of religion, atheism and secularism.⁸ Since the Second Vatican Council and especially in the wake of its much debated Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, several projects in Catholic theology have been undertaken to deal with matters of Church and secular culture. In protestant theology, in the wake of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*,⁹ a whole new field of studies emerged, which dealt with matters of faith and secular culture, and since the 1970s has come to be called 'public theology'.

However, modern theology engaging with secular societies has not prevented the increasing disjunction between dwellers and seekers that sociologists have described. This raises the question whether and how theology should change its strategy or content, if the problem needs to be dealt with on the level of theology, instead of sociology, philosophy or psychology. Exclusively blaming the Church magisterium or a specific type of orthodox theology for this disjunction would not be very helpful, but instead would mean merely restating the case. Suggesting that theology should adapt to the language and spirit of the time, is missing the fact that modern theology has known a strong history of adaptation. It has engaged with existential philosophy, critical theology, cultural studies, and has adopted phenomenological, contextual and interdisciplinary approaches, to name but a few. This however has not prevented the

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

⁸ See for example the lemma's "atheism" or "secularization/secularity," *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), pp. 49-58 and pp. 971-986.

⁹ Helmut R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1951).

increasing cultural and ideological gap between believers in the Church and others outside the Church.

Whether or not the seekers would accept the idea from *Lumen Gentium* that faith is ‘aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth’, which is not just ‘word of men but truly the word of God’, could as well prove an important factor for the difficulty to overcome the disjunction between Church and seekers. The theology that underlies the statement that the *sensus fidelium* would obediently stand under the guidance of a sacred teaching authority embodied by the Church, will most probably be unintelligible or unacceptable for most seekers, because this is precisely one of the reasons why they are identified by sociologists as a group. Despite certain efforts on both sides to overcome the disjunction, it seems quite a difficult task to overcome the fundamental philosophical and theological disagreements, which is an altogether different problematic than the problem of decreasing church attendance or the difficulty of delineating the spirituality of ‘religion without belonging’.

The thesis I will defend in this chapter is that theologians should not get too involved in specifically presenting proposals to overcome the disjunction between Church and seekers. Theology could instead present or criticize the foundational views implied by others, which could enable the apologetic conversation or appealing practice that they have in mind. In order to do so, I will assume that people in and outside the Church have something in common as far as their relationship to their environment and fellow human beings is concerned. They have a similar way of participating in public life. Based on that assumption, I will then argue that both dwellers and seekers share a common, civil practice that from the perspective of systematic theology could be explored further within the framework of sacramental theology. From that theological perspective, participating in public life could be regarded as a sacramental practice of both dwellers and seekers. If this participation could be marked as sacramental, then it would be possible to understand the becoming of the Church from that sacramental practice, which is an ecclesiological claim not dissimilar from that of *nouvelle théologie* or the Second Vatican Council.

BETWEEN ADAPTATION AND CRITIQUE: THE FAILURE OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Charles Matthewes describes the universal character of the field of public theology in his book, *A Theology of Public Life*. To him, public life includes everything concerned with the public good – everything from clearly political actions such as voting, campaigning for a candidate, or running for office, to less directly political, like social activities such as a sports club, or a neighborhood commission, volunteering for food banks,

and speaking in a civic forum, and to arguably non-political behaviors, such as simply talking to one's family, friends, colleagues or strangers about public matters of common concern. The public sphere is quite a recent discovery of theology. It has opened a field of studies on topics such as church and state, religion and democracy, religious universality and pluralism, and divine sovereignty and human autonomy.¹⁰

The concept of the 'public' in theology serves to understand the implications of the Church playing a new, more marginal role in Western society. Furthermore, the public legitimizes the study of faith and religion in a secularizing world. One could wonder whether the discovery of public life as a research topic is the last resort for theology in a secular environment, representing the struggle of theology being confronted by the secularity of public life that it finds itself in. Whether it's wishful thinking or theology breaking down the barriers of its own field of studies, it is important to ask what aspect of public life makes it suitable for theological reflection in a secular environment. To answer that question, I will first distinguish three types of 'public theology'.

The negative consequence of the universal meaning of the term 'public', according to Matthewes, is that certain variants have become self-destructively accommodating to the society they have been developed in. He argues that they let the 'larger' secular world's self-understanding set the terms, and then ask how religious faith contributes to the purposes of public life, understood within these terms. Matthewes voices the most commonly heard criticism of public theologies. Although he might unduly generalize the field, he does point at a risk that in some cases has indeed proved real.

In the Dutch theological context, the first, accommodationist type of public theology certainly exists and in recent years it has become quite influential too, if not dominant. In a much debated theological pamphlet, theologian Ruard Ganzevoort – perhaps best described as the Dutch Don Cupitt – writes that we need a 'public theology', a theology that according to him is of service to the modern world, by translating the old unintelligible language of faith that has become obsolete long ago into what he calls 'the meaning of modern culture'. In doing so, he argues that public theologians should give up their truth claims and offer wisdoms of life where needed. They should become "compassionate therapists of repressed but insatiable desires by giving a new language and meaning to these desires, thus making them manifest and instrumental for building a society of hope and peace."¹¹ 'Public' in this type of theology, means non-

¹⁰ Charles Matthewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Ruard Ganzevoort, *Spelen met heilig vuur. Waarom de theologie haar claim op de waarheid moet opgeven* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2003), pp. 19-20.

traditional, non-institutional, non-doctrinal, and non-propositional, and perhaps, one should add: non-critical. A public theology of this kind declares itself to be culturally and pastorally orientated, rather than analytically, and presumes it is more contemporary than any theology of retrieval will ever be – in whatever form: magisterial, or the ones aiming for ressourcement or recontextualisation. It reaches out to religious seekers by claiming that the seekers belong as much to religious traditions as the dwellers do. But it comes at a price, which is either a reduction of religion and faith to any meaning-giving act, or a resentment towards religious traditions and their representatives.

There is no such resentment in what actually has come to be known as ‘public theology’, the second type. In her book *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age*, Elaine Graham claims that public theology is a critical response of religious communities to secular liberalism bracketing out religious reasoning from public discourse and requiring its translation into a shared universal rational language.¹² According to her, certain versions of secularism have extended a specific element of the European Enlightenment tradition, which imagined religion to be properly outside the frame of the public sphere. The Enlightenment thinkers sought to construct a new political reality in which religion would be outside the frame of the public sphere. According to sociologists Craig Calhoun and David Martin, Kant’s effort to reconstruct religion ‘within the limits of reason alone’ was an intrusion of the practical and lived orientations of many religious people.¹³ It did respect a specific area for faith – the *Eigensinn* or *sensus privatus* of religion – but only by excluding that particular aspect from the realms of reason and thus from the public sphere.

Elaine Graham claims that the present situation defies this segment of modernity and qualifies our time as ‘post-Enlightenment’ and ‘post-secular’. Currently, she argues, there is a “unique juxtaposition of both significant trends of Enlightenment secularism and continued religious decline (...) and signs of persistent and enduring demonstrations of public, global faith.”¹⁴ According to her, in this particular but global situation, the specific task of public theology is to negotiate ‘a path between the rock of religious revival and the hard place of secularism’,

¹² Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London, SCM Press, 2013).

¹³ Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Cornel West [Afterword by Craig Calhoun] (New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 118-134; David Martin, *Religion and Power. No Logos without Mythos* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

¹⁴ Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, p. 65.

hence the title of her book. In the wake of a post-Enlightenment philosophy of engagement, Elaine Graham opts for a form of public theology as apologetics, advocating the public presence of theology which supports dialogue and persuasion. In this way, she is an exponent of what has become the mainstream public theology, that has developed ever since Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* to Max Stackhouse's impressive project *God and Globalization*¹⁵ into what is now a major field in contemporary theology and of which Sebastian Kim is also an important advocate.¹⁶ It forms a tradition of ideas that seeks to generate informed understandings of the theological and religious dimensions of public issues, sometimes with a focus on, in Kim's case, intercultural and global developments. To Graham, public theology should be less concerned with defending the interests of specific faith communities, although she makes room for a specific role for local communities, the laity and grass roots practices of discipleship that embraces active citizenship.

Contrary to the first accommodationist type, this second type of public theology is clearly critical, but merely in a strategic and practical sense. Strategic, because it is committed to a shared realm of dialogue and communicative reason and to the collaborative task of building a cohesive civil society, with genuine mutual accountability of a diversity of communities. In doing so, it proposes the need for Christians to understand the insights of secular reason, in order to become supporters of justice and the common good, rather than engaging in a real theological critique of secular reason. Its criticism is political rather than theological, operating on the same level as the secularism it wants to criticize. It is practical or pastoral, because it presents itself as transformational rather than propositional, and seeks for a practical wisdom, which is concerned with contributions to a flourishing public square. This second type of public theology, with clear political and emancipatory overtones, could have an appeal to religious seekers, because it engages with secular matters that they could easily relate to, even though it does so from a particular religious perspective that they do not (yet) have.

A third type of 'public theology' is made up of a group of theologians (e.g. Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank) who to a certain degree would not approve of the categorization. As a group of contemporary thinkers, they point to developments in the broader field of theology and the public, in which material theological content provides a straightforward critique of secular liberalism and contemporary

¹⁵ Max L. Stackhouse, Max, *God and Globalization* [4 Vols] (New York: Continuum, 2000-2007).

¹⁶ Sebastian Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

capitalism.¹⁷ In his later work, Jürgen Habermas insisted on a public sphere with an important and even necessary role for religious traditions in countering the ideology of neoliberalism, which led him to turn to religion as a potential source of alternative civic values. To Habermas, religion is therefore valuable as a moral source and could be regarded a resource for democratic politics. It offers, what he notably called a ‘semantic potential’, the potential for new meaning, not least to a political left that since 1968 may have exhausted other resources. Habermas’ account however, of the public sphere and its participants pays almost no attention to the content of religion and he presents it merely as a tool for a morally better oriented and more accommodating democracy.

Already in the 1980s, Alasdair MacIntyre suggested to make more room for religious traditions themselves by claiming that the Enlightenment, instead of being a neutral, universal position, is itself a particular tradition and world view like any other, and embodies the interest of a particular group. This is an important given for the discussion about building bridges between religious seekers and dwellers, because all too often it is suggested that the seekers have not committed to a particular tradition, while the dwellers have. But to be a seeker is just as much a particular engagement, albeit a less outspoken or articulate one. The very possibility of a critical engagement presumes some shared commitment to truth, even if that truth cannot be securely grasped and possessed.¹⁸ Therefore, against the false neutrality of modern liberalism, MacIntyre speaks of tradition-based reasoning embedded in social and historical practices, but open to dialogue, interaction and development, which could be regarded a particularist model of modernity in which religious seekers are just as much dwellers that have to account for their own specific position.

In his collection of essays, *Faith in the Public Square*, Rowan Williams voices the same concerns as MacIntyre, and summarizes his public theology as a ‘critique of programmatic secularism’.¹⁹ Williams, like MacIntyre, views the state as a community of communities, rather than a monopolistic sovereign power, thereby supporting a pluralist and decentralized pattern of social life. Williams advocates a strong connection between religion and the secular, but only by displacing the public from its common location to a liturgical dwelling. He has given a description of the Christian churches as being public, in as far as Christian

¹⁷ Cf. John Hughes, “After Temple? The Recent Renewal of Anglican Social Thought,” *Anglican Social Theology* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), pp. 80-90.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁹ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

believers go out to listen and to be spoken to. In his view, public theology would not primarily be the normative self-manifestation of a particular community of faith in a world of diversity, instead it is founded up-on the original, self-relativizing moment of silence, in which a community gathers to listen to the Word of God. Contrary to Elaine Graham's plea for a commitment to a shared realm of communicative reason, Williams argues for a non-negotiable cohesion of commitments that is embodied by a listening community. According to him, the language of public theology is therefore marked by contemplation and interruption rather than by the communication with others. Even in those cases that interruption occurs within the communication with others, it is not the communicative act itself that constitutes theology as being public. Yet, that does not entail that the Church has to contemplatively withdraw from the world, but it seeks to voice its primal moment of contemplation in the world for the world.

This third type of 'public theology', illustrated by the work of MacIntyre and Williams, is primarily ecclesial and represents a conservative critique of modernity. Politically, it is just as critical as the second type, and often supports similar, socialist sympathies, as John Milbank ends his recent book *Beyond Secular Reason* by saying that his political theology can be regarded a 'left' reading of Catholic social teaching.²⁰ But more importantly, theologically, this third type of public theology has strong post-liberal overtones: Christ interprets the world, rather than that God's Word can be used for supporting political or hermeneutical positions. At first sight therefore, this third type of public theology could seem highly unsuitable for finding a connection between religious seekers and dwellers, but it might serve at least as a criticism of the claim that it is possible to build bridges between these two sociologically distinguished groups, so long as one abandons its particular traditional language.

The three types of public theology (accommodationist, strategic, postliberal) all seem to fail in overcoming the disjunction between dwellers and seekers. The accommodationist type adapts the specific language and practices of a religious tradition to the spirit of the time, with the (sometimes even intentional) result of blurring the lines between believers and seekers, and adapting the content of theology to that of the surrounding culture in which this theology has been developed. The strategic type of public theology presents the moral content of a particular religious tradition as a helpful and critical tool for building a better society. Confirming or contradicting the differences between the religious and the secular merely serve the ultimate goal of its political agenda. The

²⁰ John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order. The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

third, postliberal or neo-orthodox type of public theology makes no effort whatsoever to overcome the disjunction between dwellers and seekers, but instead presents a robust critique of the liberal presuppositions that are at the heart of calling people outside religious traditions ‘religious seekers’.

CHURCH IN THE WORLD: THE SACRAMENTAL ONTOLOGY OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Ever since John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963), modern theologians have made an effort to formulate a response to the ongoing secularization in western culture and the ever widening gap between Church and world. Despite all the attempts to reflect on the transformation of religion in a secularized culture, this has not prevented Church and theology from becoming increasingly marginalized. Instead of formulating a response to the rapid socio-cultural transformations, theologians could have pursued their own modern project, which started roughly at the same time. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to a branch of Catholic theology that embraced secular culture, without resigning to non-religious or non-theological arguments to be able to do so. Instead, it offered a theological account of the world that was critical of modernity without becoming anti-modern, and it operated amidst an increasingly secularizing culture without losing its position as a particular tradition of faith. This branch of theology has come out of the work of the theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* movement²¹ and became a dominant voice at the Second Vatican Council. It is perhaps best represented in the work of Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, among others. In this chapter, it is illustrated by the theology of Schillebeeckx.

In his last major work, *Church. The Human Story of God*,²² Schillebeeckx opens the first chapter with the sentence ‘Extra mundum nulla salus’, a play on ‘Extra ecclesiam nulla salus’. To him, this is a serious and very fundamental theological play on words, and one that – not surprisingly – has been criticized ever since and sometimes misunderstood. In a letter to the participants of a conference about his work in 2008, he wrote that most of the criticism of that sentence, concentrates too one-sidedly on the word ‘mundum’, as if he had wanted to make the suggestion that Church and world are equal in having the possibility to accommodate salvation, or that the church has become redundant since modern theology discovered the salvific qualities of the

²¹ Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement. A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²² Schillebeeckx, *Collected Works*, Vol. X.

secular. Instead, he writes that the critics seem to forget that the word ‘salus’ is a theological concept, one that signifies the God-given quality of salvation and it should therefore not be taken as a ‘humanist’ concept of human well-being. However, he argues, ‘salus’ and ‘mundum’ are necessarily intertwined, in as far as salvation needs to be and can be experienced in the world and is mediated by others, while at the same time, “the Living and Eternal God is both near and ‘always going out ahead’ of these experiences and mediations.”²³

Since the Second Vatican Council, and especially in the wake of *Gaudium et Spes*, the relationship of Church and world has been central to Schillebeeckx’ theology. At first, his treatment of the subject was not cultural or political, nor was it meant to be primarily pastoral or strategic. The nature of his commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes* was rather metaphysical and anthropological, i.e. deeply rooted in the doctrines of creation and sin. To him, ‘world’ is the place of grace and its shadows, and the Church a community that responds to the call for forgiveness, and as such, sign and instrument of the fulfilment of the history of salvation: *sacramentum mundi*.

In his extensive commentary on Schema XIII, the preparatory document for *Gaudium et Spes*, Schillebeeckx writes that at the core of the document lies the recognition that in the Church, the mystery of Christ is revealed in a discernible form in history.²⁴ Yet, according to him, God is not present in the Church alone, but it is God’s presence to the whole world that is made visible and witnessed by the Church. As a concentrated presence of grace, the Church seeks to manifest what is present in every human existence: the givenness of God’s grace. ‘World’, to Schillebeeckx therefore, is a theological concept that refers to a profane reality with its own structures and laws, precisely because it has been taken up by God in Christ. He writes: Although [the world] has its own secular goals, given to human beings to make it their own, it is given in human hands to glorify God’s name.’ As such, he considers the world as God’s creation to be a desacralizing and demythologizing act, which has become present in Christ, in an absolute and gratuitous way.

John Milbank argued²⁵ that in this type of Catholic theology, creation as a whole is regarded as being autonomous, famously stating that “whereas the French version supernaturalizes the natural, the German version naturalizes the supernatural. The thrust of the latter version is in the direction of a mediating theology, a universal humanism, a

²³ Lieven Boeve et al., *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. xiv-xv.

²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 73-88.

²⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1990), p. 207.

rapprochement with the Enlightenment and an autonomous secular order (...), while the French version [tends] towards a recovery of a pre-modern sense of the Christianized person as the fully real person.” Milbank however, opting for the French variant, fails to see that the autonomy of the world in the so-called ‘German version’ – to which also Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu belong – is the consequence of God’s grace in Christ, made visible by the reconciled People of God in the Church. Nonetheless, instead of denying the world its autonomy, as neo-orthodox theologies have done, modern Catholic theology considered the world within the conceptual framework of graced nature.

Thus, Schillebeeckx’ view of the autonomous world has a firm Christological foundation. His biographer, Erik Borgman, has claimed that for Schillebeeckx, ‘Jesus’ message and acts can be regarded as redeeming the present, and the ongoing inspiration people experience from his life and message, signifies Christ’s continuing presence among us.²⁶ Accordingly, Church and theology do not present Christ’s message to the world, but gather and seek to embody the present message of God’s promise that lives among people. This could serve as an invitation to religious seekers to become members of the Church, not least because the Church would be willing to listen to their joys and sorrows. This is not the same however, as claiming that whatever happens outside the Church could just as well be regarded as Church. Against bishop John Robinson, Schillebeeckx himself wrote that there is a stubborn and mistaken suggestion in *Honest to God* that compassion with others is the source of Christ’s grace in the world, while he stresses that instead, it is God’s compassion with Christ, the Living One, through the Spirit in his Body, the Church.²⁷

So, Church and world do not simply relate to each other as that which is familiar to Christianity and that which is foreign to Christianity, or as the difference between the religious and the secular, dichotomies that have been expressed by both liberal and orthodox theologians, but they are two complementary forms of one Christianity, which is both sacred and profane, because it is sanctified through Christ Jesus. Christian life therefore is lived in the world, and the Church is its inspiration, its embodiment and its fulfilment. For contemporary theology, this integral – or rather, incarnational – relationship between Christ, Church and world could prove to be vital. Life in the Church and secular life are not considered opposites, but they are shaped by each other in Christ, who has made human history a sacrament of salvation. From a theological point of

²⁶ Erik Borgman, “Edward Schillebeeckx’s Reflections on the Sacraments and the Future of Catholic Theology,” *Concilium* 2012/1, London: SCM Press, pp. 13-24.

²⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 80.

view, this means that in Christ, the world of seekers and the world of believers is one and the same, the place of God's history of salvation, which is made visible and completed in the Church.

The question which then arises is how this 'sacramental ontology',²⁸ that has dominated twentieth century Catholic theology, can be made fruitful for our current debate on religious seekers? Would it be helpful, as Schillebeeckx suggested, to understand the whole of secular life as emerging from God's sacramental presence? Could modern citizenship then – the subject of contemporary public life – be regarded as a liturgy of some sorts, a responsive, sacramental expression of God's presence in the world? Schillebeeckx himself has never drawn that conclusion, but he did make room for Christian living being considered in the wake of the sacraments. A similar move has been made by the International Theological Commission in its recent document on the *sensus fidei*,²⁹ when it suggests that the Holy Spirit can become present in the faithful intuitions of the baptized people. But again, as in Schillebeeckx's case, this concerns Christians, and not unbaptized people outside the Church.

The Church needs the faithful to become Church, just as public life needs the Church to make visible that Christ is present in the world. So the consequence of that presupposition is that public life accommodates faith through love, and it is theology's task to understand the sovereignty of grace that is at work amidst all of this. Not by displacing Christ's government to a separate realm, nor by diminishing the Christ-event to a particular narrative of virtues – either ethical or theological – but by providing the critical tools for becoming Church, dedicated to the common good of all people. To Schillebeeckx, the Church's social teaching – her own public theology – must be the proof of the extent to which she understands herself as the eschatological community of salvation in the world, and it is in this understanding that the world appears as a sign of the hidden God it lives from and towards.

This sets a new agenda for a new and emerging field like public theology. It is closest to the postliberal type, but with similar outcomes as the second, strategic type. Its ultimate goal is not to mediate the gospel of the past to a world of seekers, but to show how this world itself is the space for the nearness of God's reign. In the wake of Schillebeeckx, theology's task then is to show how public life is sacramental, how it is sign and instrument of the presence of God. As Vatican II stressed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et*

²⁸ Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology. A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁹ International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*.

Spes: “The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord’s Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other human beings of our age.”³⁰ This should be the focus for a theology that both wants to be truly theological and truly public, i.e. both discerning the signs of the times as signs of God’s presence and reaching out to the religious seekers of our present time.

THE SACRAMENT OF PUBLIC LIFE: DIVINE PROMISE IN A WORLD OF SEEKERS

How can the sacramental ontology that has dominated twentieth century Catholic theology, be made fruitful for current debates in public theology? Does it provide the foundations for understanding public life as emerging from God’s sacramental presence? Could public life itself be viewed as a sacramental expression of that presence? If so, how exactly could it be viewed as a sacramental act itself and not fall into the same trap as some contextual and social approaches do: confusing the visible with the invisible, or bracketing the invisible altogether? To discern the sacramental in public life, it is important to note that sacraments are not considered to be instances of a miraculous divine revelatory act, but effective signs of God’s ongoing presence to the world. Sacraments are calling on the community of believers to witness to God’s presence and to make visible and become the instrument of the promise of salvation. Would it be possible to understand the worldliness of that call in such a way that it becomes possible to conceive of a seekers’ response to it?

To answer this question, it could be useful to refer to the original meaning of ‘sacrament’, which involves swearing an oath. In his book *The Sacrament of Language*, Giorgio Agamben offers an ‘archaeology of the oath’, in which he presents the oath as a spoken sacrament of power. He refers to Cicero who wrote that the oath expresses a duty to consider not what one may have to fear in case of violation but wherein its obligation lies: “an oath is an assurance backed by religious sanctity; and a solemn promise given, as before God as one’s witness, is to be sacredly kept. For the question no longer concerns the wrath of the gods (for there is no such thing) but the obligations of justice and good faith.”³¹ So, the oath assures the truthfulness of language by which it assures its own efficacy. And it is this truthfulness that determines the resemblance of the oath with faith, because faith has a similar performative aspect. To have faith in someone

³⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 3.

is the high regard for that person as a consequence of our having confidently given ourselves over to him, binding ourselves in a relationship of trust. Agamben notes that there is a certain inequality in placing one's faith in somebody to secure his guarantee and support in return. According to him, it is authority which is exercised at the same time as protection for somebody who submits to it, in exchange for, and to the extent of his submission.

As such, the oath has always been the performance of an important function in international public law, in the relationship between cities and people, which raises the question for the intrinsic relationship between faith and public life, and the distinction between the two: which aspects of public life are constituted and protected by the oath and hence, by faith. To maintain this precarious balance between trust and law, or faith and politics, the balance itself needs confirmation and performance, which indicates the connection between the oath and dedication, or devotion, and it is this devotional aspect that leads to calling the oath a sacrament, a testimony that is brought into action by speech.

But this intrinsic relation of faith and public life, performed by the sacrament, became a political instrument of identity. Despite the prohibition in Matthew 5,34, the oath was approved of and codified by the Church, which made the oath an essential part of its own juridical order and Christian practice, and as such became an institutionalising tool. In the *Mystic Fable*, Michel De Certeau describes this development of how the sacrament became tied to the altar, by referring to the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which declared sacramental practice to be "the instrument of a campaign to free Christians from the grip of the first large popular heresies, autonomous communal movements, and growing secular powers." In this way, the Eucharist became a locus where the Church could exercise its control over the sacred. As De Certeau writes: "This Eucharistic body was the 'sacrament' of the institution, the visible instituting of what the institution was meant to become, its theoretical authorization and its pastoral tool."³²

This development signifies a radical change from the original meaning of the sacrament. In her book *Sacramental Poetics*, Regina Schwarz describes this change from the sacrament as the power to create and maintain a healthy social body to the right of a hierarchical Church to dispense the medicine of the Eucharist. The authority of the oath based on faith and trust, becomes an instrument of control, with the consequence of creating a sharp division between Church and public life. The sacrament thus has become the visible sign of a visible institution that presents its

³² Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable. Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 85-90.

own glory as the embodiment of the glory it proclaims, instead of being the utterance or gesture of an invisible promise that maintains a bond of trust between the sacred and the secular.³³ As such, it has become susceptible to manipulation and in some cases an instrument for serving absolute political rule. Modern political theology has developed a strong criticism of the confusion of divine and human sovereignty, and the displacement of the *Corpus Mysticum*. Schillebeeckx' sacramental theology and its criticism of the ecclesial confinement of the sacrament to the seven sacraments alone could be viewed as such a criticism.

Secular culture has concluded that the next step to be made is a more modest political role for faith or the Church, by identifying it as a particular narrative of virtues but without a universal concept of divine sovereignty or divine law. The unmasking of the Church's power and identity politics is one of several reasons why people have abandoned the Church, and with it, they have abandoned the opportunity to articulate their response to the promise of salvation in the Church that performs its task by discerning God's presence in the world. The sacramental ontology of *nouvelle théologie*, supplemented with a theology of the oath, could offer secular culture a view of God's coming presence in public life: an ongoing relationship confirmed and maintained by a politics of trust, a sacramental performance that will not suggest it could make God's presence itself visible. On the contrary, the awareness of the original, intrinsic connection between trust and devotion in the oath, could be a first step in realizing that the sacrament of public, secular life is a sign of the *invisibility* it lives from and towards.

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³³ Regina M. Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism. When God Left the World* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 18-26.

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CHAPTER VIII

**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
LATE MODERNITY:
ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES FROM A
WESTERN POINT OF VIEW¹**

RAINER BUCHER

Christ Jesus, “though He was by nature God...emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave,” (Phil 2:6) and “being rich, became poor” (2 Cor 8:9) for our sakes. Thus, the Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice. Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart,” (Lk 4:18) “to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 8)

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.

[...]

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37). (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49)

¹ Rainer Bucher’s original German text was translated into English by Ms. Rebecca Pohl and ms. Michelle Rochard, and was supervised by the editors of this volume.

THE NEW SITUATION OF RELIGION(S)

Regarding the relationship between religion and societies of the West, we currently have three explanatory models available: the slightly outdated secularization theory, the individualization theory, and the idea of a 'post-secular' society introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 2001. All these models can point to empirical evidence in support of their claims.

Secularization theory² claims that the processes of social modernization eventually have a negative impact on the stability and vitality of religious communities, practices, and convictions. There is a fair amount of evidence to support this, especially if 'secularization' is taken to mean, somewhat narrowly, the shift of religious content and validity claims to the private realm and the neutralization of religion in the public sphere.

From this perspective, Western societies really are structurally secular. The historical core of Europe's process of secularization is the high death-toll of the religious wars of early modernity, which resulted in many societal sectors (state, economy, science, etc.) gradually developing a logic of self-perception and action, which was more independent of religion. Even more importantly, these sectors succeeded in asserting this logic over religious institutions.

Apart from a few exceptions,³ European societies are certainly not secularized, if 'secularization' is taken to mean the *general* neutralization of religious content, its wholesale disappearance, or the general loss of

² Cf. e.g. Detleff Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Authoritative today: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). The term 'secularization' originated as an observational term with rather negative connotations, describing the loss of influence on the part of religious institutions. To the Churches, the term expresses what they actually experienced in modernity. This somewhat denunciatory use of the concept 'secularization' has, however, a historical ground. The transfer of Church property into worldly ownership, as in the notorious 'Final Recess of the Imperial Deputation' in 1803, was called *secularization*. 'Secularism', on the other hand, means a combative attitude against any religion, be it in the socio-political field – e.g., the variants of *laicism* – or in the cognitive-ideological field – e.g., the Anglo-Saxon neo-atheists.

³ Several areas of religious desertification constitute significant exceptions to the relative stability of religious practices and attitudes, e.g., large parts of the former GDR or of the Baltics and the Czech Republic. However, parts of France and the Netherlands meanwhile also appear to be affected by this diagnosis. Cf. José Casanova, "Die religiöse Lage in Europa," *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2007), pp. 322-357, specifically pp. 352-357.

plausibility among the populace. The relevant data show⁴ that the Christian Churches, and, increasingly, also other religious communities, remain important sources of orientation for individual lives as well as for existential questions, although – admittedly – the situational precondition for this is the logic of individual freedom. In other words: everybody has the ‘secular option’ (Hans Joas). The central level of dispute over religion in European societies, then, does not take place at the level of the structural secularization of ‘secularized’ and differentiated sectors of society, nor at the level of the logic of the freedom of religion of individuals. Rather, the conflicts over religion mostly take place in the cultural sphere of values, norms, and the social realities ‘between’ these two levels.

The individualization theory, which has been prominent in the sociology of religion at least since the Swiss study ‘Jede(r) ein Sonderfall’ (‘Everyone a Special Case’) (1993),⁵ assumes that what is taking place “is not a loss of religion” – as the Churches like to perceive the ongoing development – but rather “a restructuring of the religious system and a change in religious forms of expression”⁶ obviously “along the lines of the I.” According to this interpretation, religion does not disappear in modernity, but is transformed into an individual project, which is reconfigured for each phase of life.

There is ample evidence for this theory, too. After all, the biographies of choice, forced upon us by our present time, produce a high demand for strategies that cope with contingency. Those who *can* make many decisions, *must* make them, risk a lot, and must be held accountable for their decisions. In the eyes of individualized persons, life in Western societies is threatened by collapse. The individualization of religion is not the consequence of egocentric pride, as it is sometimes stated within the Church, but rather the immediate consequence of a social situation in which biography increasingly becomes the final place where the disparate parts of society are tied together.

The third explanatory model is the theory of the ‘post-secular’, prominently advocated by Jürgen Habermas in his acceptance speech at

⁴ Regina Polak (ed.), *Zukunft, Werte, Europa. Die Europäische Wertestudie. 1990–2010. Österreich im Vergleich* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau, 2011); Hans Joas and Karl Wiegandt, “Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen,” *Religionsmonitor 2008* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008).

⁵ Alfred Dubach and Roland J. Campiche (eds.), *Jede(r) ein Sonderfall? Religion in der Schweiz. Ergebnisse einer Repräsentativbefragung* (Zurich: NZN Buchverlag, 1993).

⁶ M. Krüggeler and P. Voll, “Strukturelle Individualisierung – ein Leitfaden durchs Labyrinth der Empirie,” Dubach and Campiche (eds.), *Jede(r) ein Sonderfall?*, p. 43.

the ceremony of the conferral of the Peace Prize in 2001.⁷ Habermas articulates the late modern awareness of Western, religiously ‘unmusical’ intellectual elites that religion offers ‘resources’, not only for individual life choices, but also for the legitimation and stability of constitutional democracy. These resources are not easily available without religion, or, in other words, religious language cannot be translated into non-religious language without loss.

At the same time, amidst the ongoing transition towards globalization, Western societies are confronted with *public religions*.⁸ This creates a new and novel visibility of religion in the public sphere. Modern Western societies are globalized in terms of economics, the media, and mobility. They have disempowered Christianity as the dominant social and individual power, and, at the same time, they support active religious freedom. Given these parameters, these societies cannot turn a blind eye to public expressions and practices of religion. On the one hand, this irritates those who like to see themselves as part of a culturally Christian society. On the other hand, this requires a high demand for religious-political regulation.

Without doubt, all three models, as attempts to grasp the situation of religion(s) in Western societies, describe real phenomena. Despite their focus on divergent issues, the three approaches seem fundamentally compatible. After all, the key characteristic of the whole religious field in Western societies lies in the fact that religion(s), in times of global and hegemonic capitalism, is (are) becoming constituted along the same lines

⁷ In his acceptance speech of the Peace Prize of the German Bookshops in October 2001, Jürgen Habermas used the phrase ‘post-secular society’ as a central category in his diagnosis of our time. The term has resonated widely and persistently. Habermas’s diagnosis contains prognostic as well as normative elements. He expects that religious tradition and practices will continue to exist even in ‘secularized’ societies, and he sees a lot of positive elements in this development in so far as religious traditions make valuable (and, in a certain sense, irreplaceable) resources available for a liberal polity. Though Habermas states that the dialogue between religion(s) and modern science and the democratic state has to remain situated on the basis of secular reason, he regards defining the precise boundary line between secular reason and religious language as a *shared* task of both sides, and requires from the secular side ‘a sensitivity to the strength of the articulation of religious languages’. (*Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), p. 22). See also Rudolf Langthaler and Herta Nagl-Docekal (eds.), *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas* (Wien: Oldenburg, 2007).

⁸ Cf. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1994); José Casanova, “Public religions revisited,” *Bestandsaufnahmen zu Sozialethik und Religionssoziologie* (Paderborn-Munich: Schöningh, 2008), pp. 313-338.

as an increasing number of other areas of life, namely, according to the patterns and rules of the market.

Hence, religion is not only individualized from the side of demand – everyone can and actually does build his or her own personal religion – but also from the side of production. Many of its characteristics migrate to other cultural fields, e.g., to the media, economic forms, or a new (trivial-)aestheticizing art-religion, involving museums and pop culture events. Hans-Joachim Höhn's 'theory of religious dispersion' demonstrates the extent to which the "post-secular re-constitution of the religious implies a many-sided transformation process, which includes the conditions of the mediation of religious traditions, social forms, and public presence of lived religions, as well as the use of semantic and aesthetic forms of expression outside religious contexts."⁹

Consequently, the theory of secularization holds the undeniable truth that nobody has to enter into a specific market and that, actually, many – and this varies from country to country¹⁰ – do not even enter the religious market at all. While the theory of secularization articulates freedom *from* the market, the theory of individualization articulates freedom *in* the market. Even those who enter the religious market keep their freedom – as customers. They keep it diachronically because they can change providers; they maintain it synchronically because they can combine elements from different providers, just like in ordinary markets. They also keep the freedom of changing intensity; this, too, corresponds with normal customer behavior. Finally, the theory of the 'post-secular' holds that the religious market *still exists*, that it offers a 'product' sui generis, that it is – in relative not in absolute terms – a stable market, and one to reckon with, albeit to different degrees of intensity throughout Europe.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

For the Catholic Church, all this means that it has to come to terms with manifest experiences of undeniable decline in Western societies, above all, in those regions where, for a long time, the Church not only sought proximity but also possessed power. In the end, it means that religion today is constituted less in an *ecclesiastic dispositif*, according to which religion was organized through concepts such as membership, following,

⁹ Hans-Joachim Höhn, *Postsäkular. Gesellschaft im Umbruch – Religion im Wandel* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁰ See the pertinent country comparisons in Joas and Wiegand, *Säkularisierung und Weltreligionen*, and Bertelsmann-Stiftung, *Religionsmonitor 2008*.

and power, and which also assumed that individual religiosity and collective religion, the most personal and the most public, the most intimate and the ecclesiastic authority were in alignment. In the wake of the global assertion of a liberal, capitalist society, religious practices are surrendered to the individual's freedom and thus follow suit of many other practices that previously also did not belong to the individual's freedom of choice, e.g., the choice of location, clothing, profession, or life partners.

Ever since Late Antiquity, the Christian Church in Western and Central Europe dominated discourses of knowledge, of social order, and of individual practices. Little by little – albeit never entirely, and to differing degrees, and in different shapes in different European regions – it succeeded in enforcing this dominance.

'Modernity' refers to the time in which a counter-movement against the dominance of the sole Christian Church originated. While the alternative Christianities of Wycliffe or the Hussites could still be fought off through warfare, the Protestant Reformation(s) established successful, competing Christian Churches. For the Catholic Church, this was the beginning of a whole cascade of losses of influence, which it experienced as humiliating: its disempowerment by the modern, liberal state in the bourgeois revolutions, the rise of competing political religions, such as Communism and National Socialism, the modern individualization of the religious sphere in the twentieth century.

In reaction to this cascade of losses of influence, the Catholic Church developed, in theory and in practice (where it could enforce it), a compensatory strategy of self-revaluation. Since Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), and as a reaction to the Reformation, the Catholic Church defined itself as a '*societas perfecta*': it regarded itself on a par with the early modern absolutist states. Internally, though, this meant a decisive concentration of ecclesiastic power. This strategy reached its apogee in the nineteenth century, at a time when the young European nation states, following the bourgeois revolutions, established themselves independently of religion and when the alliance between the Church and absolutism, valid even during the Catholic Enlightenment, was dissolved. The Catholic Church, as '*societas perfecta*', considered itself analogous to the state: a self-sufficient entity, which wanted either to dominate the state ('Catholic state') or to be left free from the encroachments of a 'liberal state', to which it nonetheless made a number of demands. In both cases, the Church deemed itself superior to the state.

The theorem of the '*societas perfecta*' articulates, in theological language, what can, in socio-historical terms, be described as the modern drive to organize. This became virulent precisely at the moment when the Church had to reconfigure itself in the wake of the Reformation, as well as during the early nineteenth century when it had to re-organize itself following the loss of its feudal institutional basis. The *Pian* era, the period

of the Catholic Church from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, can hence be seen as the pinnacle of Church-internal pastoral power.¹¹ Following the collapse of the Catholic milieu in the 1960s, and following the liberation of Catholics resulting in religious self-determination, i.e., from the time the structural secularization of bourgeois societies reached the cultural reality of Catholics, the Church's pastoral power plunged into its final crisis.

The strategy of defensive institutional assertiveness corresponded with an ecclesiology that excluded others from the frame of salvation. The Catholic Church considered its own state of salvation, and, especially, the reference to Jesus Christ as the central mediator of salvation, to be its own exclusive characteristic, not as a universal concept. Admittedly, the doctrine of God's mysterious ways of salvation was never fully abrogated if only because of all those who lingered 'in insurmountable ignorance of the true religion'. But, in the face of Protestant, Enlightened, and atheist competition, the early Christian 'extra ecclesiam salus non est', which had been officially endorsed at the Council of Florence, was interpreted in an increasingly exclusivist manner and implemented as such in ecclesiastic mentality and practice.

This strategy of inclusion through exclusion implied both the exclusion of others from the salvation economy as well as the internal consolidation of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. This strategy was quite successful for a long time. But it works less well once the power relations between the individual and the religious institutions, also in the Catholic world, are fundamentally reversed, and once the Catholic Church has to build community on a situational instead of on a

¹¹ On this concept: Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4 (1982), pp. 777-795; also: Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 223-254. According to Foucault, through its pastoral power, Christianity developed an entirely new mode of exercising power. Christian pastoral power has a number of characteristics that are distinct from previous modes of power. In contrast to monarchical power, which lets others die on its behalf, it is *selfless*. In contrast to judicial power, which is interested in cases rather than individuals, it is *individualizing*. It is *totalizing* in contrast to the exercise of power in antiquity, which was interested only in specific but not in comprehensive obedience up to and including the most intimate aspects of life. The new ecclesiastic pastoral power, then, refers to *everything* in life and *all* of life. Its core image is the shepherd, who must be prepared to risk his life for his sheep, has to keep every single sheep in sight and hence follows those that have lost their way, and is interested in every single aspect of every sheep. The confessional box is hence at least as important to pastoral power as the altar.

normative foundation.¹² This internal power shift within the Catholic Church is far more significant than the question of whether it is a majority or a minority church. Catholic fundamentalism is not directed towards the restitution of a Catholic majority church, but towards the restitution of clerical power within the Church.¹³

For ecclesiastic Catholic pastoral power, the present day represents the definitive endpoint of a long road of decline, which moved from cosmos to community, and finally, to the body. Christianity's cosmically coded power of interpretation was first questioned by people such as Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler. The Church's hold of the (non-ecclesiastic) community was lost in bourgeois society, i.e., in the nineteenth century, after absolutism had already freed itself from Church dominance in the eighteenth century. In a final stroke, though, the Catholic Church still attempted to exert power over the body – its practices and techniques – in particular through its moral teaching.

However, according to the available data provided by sociology of religion, the *enlightened dispositif of the religious*,¹⁴ which sought the consistency of religious practice and content in the face of reason, and judged religion by this consistency, is no longer prevalent either. Instead, an *'autological dispositif'* has become dominant in the organization and practice of individual religion in accordance with individual biographical needs, which are by no means arbitrary or trivial.¹⁵ This follows a logic of coping with life's uncertainty, among other things, with the help of religion. Religion and also the Church are thus submitted to individual

¹² Cf. Rainer Bucher, *Wenn nichts bleibt, wie es war. Zur prekären Zukunft der katholischen Kirche*, 2. edn. (Würzburg: Echter, 2012), pp. 15–41.

¹³ Cf. Rainer Bucher, *An neuen Orten. Studien zu den Konstitutionsproblemen der deutschen und österreichischen katholischen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2014), pp. 473–480.

¹⁴ According to Foucault, a *dispositif* is a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid.” The *dispositif* is furthermore the “system of relations that can be established between these elements,” and hence a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*.” (Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 194f.). Cf. Andrea Bührmann and Werner Schneider, *Vom Diskurs zum Dispositiv* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008).

¹⁵ Cf. Christoph Bochinger, Martin Engelbrecht and Winfried Gebhardt, *Die unsichtbare Religion in der sichtbaren Religion. Formen religiöser Orientierung in der religiösen Gegenwartskultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009). The authors refer to the self-empowerment of religious subjects. See also: Paul Zulehner, *Verbuntung. Kirchen im weltanschaulichen Pluralismus* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2011).

calculations of advantage. This is now also the case among practicing Catholics.

This means that ecclesiastic institutions are constantly subject to their members' approval. Hence, it is not illogical that the so-called Sinus-Milieu-Analysis¹⁶ – pastorally speaking, the most important empirical study in the German-speaking world of recent times – was conducted by a market research institute, Sociovision, and that it delivered what is to be expected from a market research company: a report on the precarious state of the market.

Many in the Catholic Church find it difficult to accept that they are now subject to the notoriously fickle behavior of their own members. In addition, throughout its long history, Christianity has had rather few experiences with market conditions. The Catholic Church's collective memory is dominated more by power than by market expertise. After all, since the Constantinian turn of the fourth century, Christianity has been accustomed to constituting itself through processes of power.

Seen from a theological perspective, the new situation threatens the Catholic Church with a fatal reversal. On the one hand, the pluralist and relativist processes, triggered by markets, cause unmistakable problems within the Church. Many Church leaders are openly irritated by the loss of sovereignty, by the fact that markets bring about freedom. On the other hand, there is the danger of accepting what is most problematic about markets: their self-referentiality, which posits market success as the final criterion. A number of all-too-enthusiastic reactions to the Catholic Church's partial media success in the past few years support this supposition.

Certainly, it is not possible to overcome the current situation by only taking refuge in well-established, though worn, discursive or social

¹⁶ Medien-Dienstleistung GmbH (ed.), *Milieuhandbuch "Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen"* (Munich-Heidelberg: MDG, 2005). An updated study exists: Medien-Dienstleistung GmbH (ed.), *MDG-Milieuhandbuch 2013. Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen in den Sinus-Milieus* (Munich-Heidelberg: MDG, 2013). An alternative update can be found in Carsten Wippermann, *Milieus in Bewegung. Werte, Sinn, Religion und Ästhetik in Deutschland. Das Gesellschaftsmodell der DELTA-Milieus als Grundlage für die soziale, politische, kirchliche und kommerzielle Arbeit* (Würzburg: Echter, 2011). After initial scepticism, many German-language dioceses went in for this analytical instrument. Concepts for pastoral implementation can be found, e.g.: Matthias Sellmann and Caroline Wolanski (eds.), *Milieusensible Pastoral. Praxiserfahrungen aus kirchlichen Organisationen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2013); Michael Ebertz and Bernhard Wunder (eds.), *Vom Sehen zum Handeln in der pastoralen Arbeit* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009); Michael Ebertz and Hans-Georg Hunstig (eds.), *Hinaus ins Weite. Gehversuche einer milieusensiblen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2008).

singularities and by excluding relationships that still need to be tried out.¹⁷ An insecure culture may look at such an exotic counter program with fascination for some time, but then it will be infested by what has been implicitly present in the structure all along: its posture of superiority over and its reticence towards reality, including church realities.

All these processes mirror the fact that the Catholic Church may continue to be a subject capable of acting, but it is also subject to its time. It is not just a strong actor, but also *sujet*, and it can no longer shield itself from the loci where it is present. These loci are no longer simply context for the Church. They inscribe themselves in the Church; they pervade it, shape it, and define it.

THE KENOTIC TURN OF VATICAN II

From the People's Church to the 'Church of the People'

Thanks to Vatican II, the Catholic Church definitely has a viable program in order to deal with the new situation. This program breaks with the exclusivism of the Catholic Church and initiates an inclusive path that is characterized by openness towards spiritual, intellectual, and political challenges. This path is openly attacked by the revisionist interpretation of Vatican II, and is squandered by liberal interpretations.¹⁸

Vatican II undertakes a true change of place and of principle towards a kenotic approach.¹⁹ The Church moves from a position of unreachable and untouchable sovereignty to a position in which it only focuses on salvation, a position which accepts no limitations to solidarity. This kenotic structure of solidarity with humanity as a whole, and the oppressed and suffering in particular, becomes the foundation for building the Church in the Council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

From the perspective of sociology of religion, it is also true for the Catholic Church that, given that the place of religion in society is currently

¹⁷ Pope Francis, by contrast, pursues a strategy of forced relativization: his relation of the truth content of the Christian tradition to specific and representative places of late modern existence in globalized times is *situational*: e.g., Lampedusa, homes for delinquent adolescents with migrant backgrounds, the World Economic Forum in Davos, which he addresses in the name of the 'excluded'.

¹⁸ Cf. Rainer Bucher, "Die Optionen des Konzils im Rezeptionsprozess der deutschen katholischen Kirche," *Diakonia. Der Dienst der Kirche in der Welt* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2013), pp. 79-99.

¹⁹ On this term, and its consequence for ecclesiastic practice, see the extensive study by Ansgar Kreutzer, *Kenopraxis. Eine handlungstheoretische Erschließung der Kenosis-Christologie* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2011).

determined by the market, it is nearing its end as a ‘people’s Church’, interpreted as a Church that is self-evident and self-evidently supporting the social order in Western societies. Yet, based on the people-of-God-ecclesiology of Vatican II and its kenotic turn, the Catholic Church has to hold on to the option of being a ‘Church of the people’. The reason for this stance is that, according to the two constitutions on the Church from the last Council, the really existing Catholic Church is ‘God’s people’, called by God and united in Christ.²⁰ It is the community of all those who believe in this universal call, without limitations.

Hence, there can be no fundamental end of the ‘Church of the people’, no retreat into a self-sufficient and self-referential minority. God’s universal saving will, and the ensuing commitment of the institutional Church to indissoluble solidarity with all people, forces the Church to develop social forms that realize this fundamental proximity to the people.

The concept of the people in ‘the people of God’ proposed by Vatican II transcends God’s ecclesiastic people and, of course, also any ‘ethnic/national’ people.²¹ The concept refers to all people and all peoples. All are called upon to belong to God’s people, to receive God’s grace, and to substantiate this themselves. The message of the God of Jesus is true for his entire people, so for all humanity. God wants, as expressed, for instance, in 1 Tim 2:4, “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” According to the Church’s doctrine, the community of God’s people, in its visible constitution as the Catholic Church, is the sign and the instrument of all humans universally being called to salvation.

According to *Lumen Gentium* 13, not only are “all men [...] called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God,” they also “belong,” albeit “in various ways” to this catholic unity of the people of God or “are related to it”: for instance, and in the first place, “all who believe in Christ,” but eventually also “the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation.” The Council sees the Church as God’s people gathered in Christ on its way to God. Everyone in the Church shares the common basis of this one task or mission: to be God’s people.

²⁰ Cf. Elmar Klinger, “Die Kirche in *Lumen gentium* – das messianische Volk Gottes,” *Diakonia* 44 (2013), pp. 310-313; Elmar Klinger, “Das Volk Gottes auf dem II. Vatikanum. Die Revolution in der Kirche,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 7 (1992), pp. 305-319.

²¹ Cf. Ottmar Fuchs, “Suche nach authentischen Erfahrungen. Volksbegehren zwischen völkischer Ideologie und volksbezogener Authentizität,” “*Wir sind Kirche*”. *Das Kirchen-Volksbegehren in der Diskussion* (Freiburg/Br.: Herder, 1995), pp. 101-110; Rainer Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology. A Study in Political Religion* (London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), pp. 112-121.

The Church has to be a place of liberation and the experience of grace, here and now; yet, at the same time, it must refer to the immeasurable horizon of God's grace and love. It is God who calls his people among all peoples. The Church has to respond to this call, not dominate it. If it really hears and follows this call, the Church becomes God's people among humanity. Whether it is indeed responding to God's call can be determined – by discerning whether it is the sign and instrument of God's love.

All this, in turn, requires that the sacramental signaling²² by God's instituted people is effectively filled with life. This enlivenment regards both the orientation of the Church's actions and its social forms. Constituted by the Gospel and its mandate, the institutional Church has to stand up for all God's people in accordance with God's saving will: it has to welcome them all. The institutional Church is obliged to all, especially to those who are not part of its institution. For them, in particular, the Church has to be a sacrament, an effective sign of grace.

The wish for like-minded people in a preferably homogenous community, although understandable from a socio-psychological perspective in times of a declining Church community, by no means represents a more vital Church, or one more faithful to the Gospel. When, from the perspective of Church development and Church action, socio-psychological needs and patterns prevail over theological and Gospel-aligned criteria, and when those groups who fulfil these needs declare themselves to constitute the true and better Church, then, although understandable, this poses a theological problem: it cannot be assumed that these socio-psychological behavioral patterns match those set out by the Gospel. On the contrary, if we heed the Bible's stories, we must assume the opposite. The Catholic Church in the West is thus confronted with the epochal task of realizing itself as a Church of the people in a post-traditional mode, beyond any social self-evidence, as a minority, yet for all.

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church: the End of Superiority

Constituting a Church of the people in a post-traditional mode really represents an epochal turn in the history of the Catholic Church. The Church has to come to terms with the new level of freedom among its own

²² Cf. Roman Siebenrock, "Universales Sakrament des Heils. Zur Grundlegung des kirchlichen Handelns nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil in der Vermittlung von 'Kirche nach innen' und 'Kirche nach außen'," *Wahrnehmungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), pp. 59-79; Günther Wassilowsky, *Universales Heilssakrament Kirche. Karl Rahners Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie des II. Vatikanums* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2001).

members. It also means that the social encoding of its message, as well as the aesthetic and cognitive encoding of the tradition, are no longer self-evidently effective and, hence, can no longer simply be continued. They no longer work as basic concepts, as frames and patterns for pastoral care. This marks a task of vast proportions: to mold the incarnation of the original Christian impulse in new forms, aesthetics, and discourses.

Whether the starting point of this task has even been reached depends on how the Church's actors at the different levels react to the irreversible experiences of the decline of ecclesiastic institutions. The temptation to follow the typical modern model is strong because its logic of exclusion corresponds with both the Church's own post-Tridentine tradition and with what late modernity holds out to religion: strategies of exculturation and regionalization.

The great, yet by no means fully fathomed, spiritual achievement of Vatican II was precisely to have overcome the path of exculturation that both modern society and its own tradition presented to the Church. This course was set in three crucial ways: Vatican II's de-clericalized conception of the pastorate transcending the Church's social boundaries,²³ its task-oriented 'signs of the times' concept,²⁴ and its inclusive People-of-God-Theology. All three ground-breaking conceptions were squandered after the Council: the conception of pastorate was squandered in canonical and day-to-day re-clericalization processes, the 'signs of the times' concept was squandered by a culturally pessimistic re-interpretation, and the People-of-God-Theology was squandered through its replacement by a harmonistic and/or a hierarchically interpreted Communio-ecclesiology.

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church is neither harmless nor self-evident. It represents the process of risky self-divesting into the dangerous realm of history, into the specific, into the political, and, hence, into all the bewildering and confusing human processes which fundamentally elude any sovereign mastery. The typically modern idea of sovereignty, which had defined the Catholic Church's ecclesiology since Vatican I,²⁵

²³ Cf. Rainer Bucher, "Nur ein Pastoralkonzil? Zum Eigenwert des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Herder-Korrespondenz Spezial* ("Konzil im Konflikt. 50 Jahre Zweites Vatikanum") 2 (2012), pp. 9-13.

²⁴ Cf. Peter Hünemann (ed.), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2006).

²⁵ Cf. Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, *Unfehlbarkeit und Souveränität. Die päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit im System der ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1975). As is well known, Carl Schmitt historically and systematically characterized all the trenchant terms of modern state theory in reverse as secularized theological terms. Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) (1922).

is thus transcended towards a politics of humility, of self-exposure, of proving itself to be the sign and the instrument of salvation. In *Gaudium et Spes*, humanity's complex history is explicitly identified as the genuine place of the Church. The Church is no longer seen as an entity that transcends history; neither does it merely lose itself in history. Rather, the Church shows its presence in history, or it is not present at all. The way in which it realizes this presence, though, becomes visible in its ministry, so in its acting and its actions. The Church thereby enters not only the risky zones of a confusing and complex world and history, but it is also taking the risk of failing to live up to its own standard. Above all, though, the Church renders itself accountable and puts itself at the mercy of those to whom it promises salvation and redemption.

Beyond Institutionalism, Exclusivism, and Extrinsicism

The conciliar path of non-exclusion is not only truly new in comparison with the modern Catholic Church; it is also a daring path. Inside and outside – always relative of course – now become, topologically speaking, fluid. They face the risk of unprotected encounters. Where inside and outside are no longer separated by real or social walls, where they are mutually exposed to each other, where they venture into the other of one's self, they enter into inevitable contrast. They meet, do not avoid each other, and have to find some common ground. This, however, introduces a space that ecclesiastic social formations, through their internal power structures, had hitherto excluded as much as possible. This space was only known from the much narrower field of missionary work: the possibility of visible failure.

The priority of God's saving will, which is independent of any church, this inclusive matrix that does not allow God's saving will to be confined within church walls, constitutes the grammar of Vatican II. Its central ecclesiastic category is 'the People of God'. It opposes the model of the Church in which its identity is constituted through numerous exclusivist procedures, and in which, moreover, the only ideas that are trusted are those that the modern period had already trusted: institutionalism, i.e., law, domination, and visibility.

Vatican II's kenotic turn is thus realized in three ways: in an anti-institutional way through the insight that the Church is not an end in itself but the servant of a message, in an anti-exclusivist way through the understanding that the Church, as the People of God, is part of humanity and so is 'bound up' in it,²⁶ and in an anti-fideistic way through the awareness that the message is subject to the necessity, but also to the possibility of a pragmatic verification of faith in the here and now.

²⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 3.

These three kinds of awareness represent core stipulations of Vatican II. In *Lumen Gentium* 1, the sacramental – so simultaneously symbolic and serving – character of the Church is put forward.²⁷ The Church is defined as the People of God to which all are called and related in specific ways.²⁸ Building on the concept of Revelation in *Gaudium et Spes*, it establishes the perichoretic relation between dogma and ministry, i.e., between language and action.²⁹

In this context, the venture of self-exposure to the present means opening oneself up to the possibility of discovering one's own message from the perspective of the present, to acquire the possibility of dogmatic discovery. The kenotic structure of the relation to the Church is therefore the foundation for the theological content of a practical theology that must be realized today.

The rejection of all self-sufficient and self-referential identity models offers specific *methodological opportunities* for the reflection on and conception of ecclesiastic action. The anti-institutional insight that the Church is not an end in itself but the servant of a message, leads to the conclusion that the Church's conceptual thinking about its actions must, by necessity and on the basis of its own message, also be self-critical.³⁰ The anti-exclusivist understanding that the Church as the People of God is part of humanity and 'bound up' in it, implies, for the conception of and reflection on the Church's actions, that really *all phenomena* of human existence have to be included. They cannot be rejected as mere 'context' of what is regarded as essential. These phenomena are real 'signs of the times' and hence have to be seen, in light of Jesus's Kingdom-of-God-

²⁷ "Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 1). On the concept of the sacrament in *Lumen Gentium*, as well as its genesis: Wassilowsky, *Universales Heilssakrament Kirche*, specifically pp. 325-348.

²⁸ "Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God" (*Lumen Gentium* 16). As is well known, the first main part of *Gaudium et Spes* goes by the title 'The Church and Man's Calling', where in *Gaudium et Spes* 11 is written: "For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human." – Cf. Elmar Klinger, "Der Glaube des Konzils. Ein dogmatischer Fortschritt," *Glaube im Prozeß. Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum* (Freiburg/Br.-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1984), pp. 615-626, p. 615.

²⁹ "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them." (*Dei Verbum* 2)

³⁰ Cf. Rainer Bucher, *Theologie im Risiko der Gegenwart. Studien zur kenotischen Existenz der Pastoraltheologie zwischen Universität, Kirche und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009).

Message, as the subject matter of the Church's conceptual discourse. The anti-extrincisist awareness, finally, that this message, like all truth, is bound to verify itself pragmatically in the here and now and can only achieve presence and prove its truthfulness through this verification, means that the reflection on and conception of ecclesiastic action cannot avoid having to put the fundamental concepts of faith at risk.

From its situational perspective, the Church's pastoral actions will not be able to avoid the risk of exposure.³¹ From the perspective of tradition, it will not be able to avoid a wholly new and deepened dogmatic re-minding, if 'dogmatic' means developing answers *from* faith to respond to questions *to* faith. Dogmas are "answers to man's inquiries into God, which pose themselves in scripture and tradition, but also in life experience."³² Both movements, though, coincide in the indefensible event.

CHURCH: THE RISK OF PRAGMATIC VERIFICATION

In our times, i.e., at the end of the Constantinian era,³³ when the Church has lost all sanctioning power over its own members, the course for the future of the Catholic Church will be decided by its decision to follow either the socio-technological path of Trent, or the spiritual-kenotic path of Vatican II, i.e., exclusion and internal consolidation versus dedication as witness to the love of God.

The path of Vatican II points to the orientation towards pastoral tasks instead of to the classic orientation towards social order and social forms. This path means realizing through deeds that the Church does not lose itself in the 'outside' of its institutional forms, but that it can only truly find itself there, where its legitimating task expects it to be. Finally, it means that the Church should make clear, in its way of operating as much as in its own structural constitution, that its essential organizing principle is not super- or subordination, but, rather, the contribution to the Church's overall pastoral mission.

The resistance to this is enormous. The remaining active faithful in the Church react defensively to all change, and the plans put forth by the 'mid-level' do not spark a magic of change. Take, for instance, the

³¹ Cf. Birgit Hoyer, *Seelsorge auf dem Land. Räume verletzbarer Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), specifically pp. 64-74; see also: Rainer Bucher, *Theologie im Risiko der Gegenwart*, pp. 203-212.

³² Rainer Bucher and Elmar Klinger, "Mich hat an der Theologie immer das Extreme interessiert". *Elmar Klinger interviewed by Rainer Bucher* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), p. 91.

³³ Cf. Roman Siebenrock, "Vom langen Schatten Konstantins," *Nach der Macht. Zur Lage der katholischen Kirche in Österreich* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2014), pp. 75-97.

unchallenged keyword in pastoral theology of the last few decades, 'living parish'. This suggests that the vitality of the institution, not the vitality of the human or of the Gospel, is of primary concern. Moreover, this indicates that the parish is apparently threatened by infirmity, otherwise it would not be necessary to constantly proclaim its vitality.

Choosing task-orientation as the constitutive rule of the Church would mean allowing the daily experienced risk of the present to penetrate into the center of pastoral realities and concepts, knowing that pastoral care can no longer be successful if it avoids this risk. In his recent *habilitation* dissertation, Michael Schüßler persuasively argues that in postmodernity, in which time gets a completely new structure, Christian practice no longer derives its identity from an overall and encompassing Christian historical narrative. Instead, Christian practice derives its identity solely from Jesus as role model, whose actions were, indeed, situational responses to what seemed necessary from the perspective of the other.³⁴ Hope, in this scenario, is less a category of salvation in the future than a category of the present, the moment of opening up in the event. "Herewith, the inculturation of the Gospel in its modern, solid state drifts out into the open sea: [...] Not the dialectic of continuity and disruption, but the event, each next step on uncertain terrain, becomes the new locus for the inculturation of the Gospel."³⁵

According to Schüßler, Jesus's 'Kingdom of God'-message refers to an event that does not want to serve as the foundation of a static and 'eternal' order, nor as the promise of an as-yet outstanding redemptive order at the 'end of time'. Rather, Jesus's concept of God represents a dynamic that is much more in the present. Schüßler argues that Jesus's parables of the Kingdom of God open up a horizon of salutary reversals and of real, often unhopd-for, new beginnings. The Kingdom of God is, in the first place, an event: the event of unhopd-for and unexpected liberation and of given, specific salvation. It is the event that happens when and where God reigns. In Luke 17:20-21 it is written: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus announces and realizes the transition to the Kingdom of God as a singular but effective event, rightful under wrong conditions.

³⁴ Cf. Michael Schüßler, *Mit Gott neu beginnen. Die Zeitdimension von Theologie und Kirche in ereignisbasierter Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013).

³⁵ Michael Schüßler, "Auf dem Sprung in die Gegenwart. 'Unsere Hoffnung' als Inspiration für das Zeugnis vom Gott Jesu in unserer Zeit," *Pastoraltheologische Informationen* 31 (2011), pp. 53-80, p. 70 (<http://miami.uni-muenster.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-6122/05.Schuessler.pdf>, 1.11.2011).

But this means: God's Kingdom is the unexpected event of a new beginning without any certainty of its outcome. It cannot be brought about – we have to let it take place. If this is the case, then, in his revelation through Jesus, God opens up a perspective for us, how we can live amidst the tensions and the paradoxes of human existence. Only by risking the event can the victims get the space to turn their silence into testimony. God, then, is the event of justice that we can only surmise. From the perspective of Jesus's practice, being Christian in our times truly demands from us that we do our utmost in showing solidarity with the lived hopes and existential abysses of the present.

The question today, then, is how Christians can give testimony to the Gospel in these risky, fluid times. Just as God's Kingdom cannot simply be erected in the here and now, nobody in the here and now can be absolutely certain to live, in their speech or in their deeds, in true discipleship to Jesus. Christian testimony is precisely not concerned with commanding the truth of a religious power.

At a time when the power of religion is, apparently, once again easily exploited for the purposes of heteronomy and violence, this recalcitrant, paradoxical structure of Christian testimony gets a humanizing quality. Its central call is reversal, the responsive event of a true new beginning. It is a gift, unannounced and unavailable.

An event-based theology and pastoral care model is conscious that the pastoral realization of the Gospel here and now is our unavoidable responsibility before God. It cannot be given up for a glorified past or a pending future. The Gospel addresses a radically situational demand. Pastoral action consists precisely of exposing oneself to the radical demands of a situation, which presents itself in the face of the other.

Loyalty to the Lord Jesus is not tied to a particular social form. It is created anew with each event. In theological terms, this means that we are constantly entangled in the ambivalence of Creation, and that we cannot escape it by moving 'forwards' or 'backwards'. According to Schüßler, Christian faith does not secure a grand religious historical pattern, be it in the form of conservative theologies of history, or in a progressive mode as exemplified by Johann Baptist Metz. Rather, God's grace liberates us to expose ourselves with each event into the present.

It is the central task of the Church to discern the Gospel here and now from the perspective of the concrete human being and so to liberate his/her life here and now from the perspective of the Gospel. Indeed, the Gospel cannot be realized without those to whom God reveals his love. Rather, the meaning of the Gospel has to be clarified from the perspective of human beings, otherwise they will experience no revelation at all. If, according to the Council, pastoral care means a creative confrontation in specific situations between the Gospel and individual human beings, then, in our times, that means embarking into the uncertain zones of possible

failure, and, moreover, embarking into the uncertain zones of one's own faith.

Christian pastoral care is thus a locus for God's manifestation into the hands of all those who relate to him. It is a place where the defenseless God is at the mercy of his people's demands. Pastoral care is concerned with God's presence among people in the risky processes of human actions, done in his name. Yes: theologically speaking, God is the seeker; he is seeking for the human being and all faith is standing in risk of the response to God's seeking. Hence, the Church can only be a Church of seekers, not only from a theological perspective – in as much as faith is not a property to be owned but a gift of grace – but also in actual fact. The Church is God's people, pilgriming people on their way to God, a Church that – alongside others – believes that “the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed” (GS 3), irrespective of their attitude towards the Church.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL SHAPE TO BE TAKEN BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATE MODERNITY

New and Old Places

The consequences of these analyses and options for the prospective development of ecclesiastic social forms are manifold, comprehensive, and sometimes even revolutionary. Already now, the Church-internal structures of communication and of power are quite new. The renewal will certainly intensify in the future. The Catholic Church will have to give up what has constituted its very structure in modernity: the categories of ‘manageability’, ‘continuity’, and the ‘claim to exclusivity’. Indeed, comprehensive biographical power, lifelong allegiance, and exclusive membership were the characteristics of the social forms of the Catholic Church.

‘Manageability’ is a typically modern form of disciplining, which modernity brought to dubious social perfection, and postmodernity brought to successful technological perfection. The ability to oversee everything is a goal that has long been unachievable but, in modernity, it is becoming increasingly achievable for power. The Council of Trent (1546-1563) organized pastoral care in such a way that “‘shepherd and flock’ (priest and parish)” were “brought together in manageable ways.”³⁶

³⁶ Petro Müller, *Eine kompakte Theologie der Gemeinde* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), p. 96.

In his role as 'milieu manager',³⁷ the priest has been, for many centuries, responsible for the control and maintenance, for the 'guardianship and surveillance' of the shrinking Catholic territory. 'Manageability', now seen from the viewpoint of pastoral care, remained a central category in community theology, which was dominant until very recently. The background against which this theology arose was not least to counteract the unmanageable phenomena of modern urbanization processes, namely, by establishing condensed social forms beneath the parish level. 'Continuity', though, and the claim to exclusivity were consequences of the 'Extra ecclesiam salus non est'.

However, in religion, we have already been living for a long time in a world of irreversible unmanageability, in a time of religious self-determination. Proximity is now coupled with anonymity and transience rather than with continuity and constant observation, or even permanent existence under the eye of the other. It is not necessary to clearly oversee one's own position in order to be recognizable, accessible, or approachable. Taking an all-controlling, central perspective might even preclude the possibility of being approached and of being asked.

Recognizability, accessibility, and approachability are the necessary categories for the Church, which, as is rightly demanded, remains present on site, exposes itself, and offers itself up. The assumption of pastoral competence has to be communicated and has to be recognizable and accessible. The reorientation towards hospitality, spontaneity, and anonymity, and with these the renunciation of the principles of control and continuity, is not easy. Rather, it is very demanding. It could, however, mark the emergence of a prospective social formation of the Church – and it characterizes what is new in the loci of pastoral care.

A Fundamental Transformation of Ecclesiastic Pastoral Power

The reorientation means that 'ecclesiastic inside' and 'social outside' are no longer separated at the new places of pastoral care. They can no longer be clearly identified through opposition, but are exacting each other, being exposed to and confronted with each other. As a result, a rather new constellation will be established: one that, on the one hand, corresponds with the Vatican II's conception of pastoral care, and one that, on the other hand, radically reshapes processes of Church building.

³⁷ Cf. Olaf Blaschke, "Die Kolonialisierung der Laienwelt. Priester als Milieumanager und die Kanäle klerikaler Kuratel," *Religion im Kaiserreich. Milieus – Mentalitäten – Krisen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), pp. 93-135.

Traditions are now no longer part of a more or less self-evident 'inside'. Rather, they are subject to individual approval and, even more importantly, to the rediscovery of an 'outside' that no longer adheres to former Christian self-evidence and that is conscious of the numerous new life patterns and existential problems that exist alongside the old ones. For the future ecclesiastic social forms, daring to engage in the confusing and insurmountably complex processes in which the pastoral actors are living in will be imperative.

Ecclesiastic pastoral power, which was very innovative in Antiquity, has, in modernity, increasingly been taken over by the state and the (human) sciences. According to Michel Foucault, this power has been momentous for the development of modern 'subjectivity' as a discursive technique. Ecclesiastic power has three fundamental properties: it is individualizing in so far as it refers to the individual, it is totalizing in so far as it refers to everything about the individual, and it claims to be selfless in so far as it is dedicated to the individual's redemption and salvation. The image of the shepherd covers all three components.

It now becomes apparent that future ecclesiastic social forms will have to be characterized by the shift from the dedication and the selflessness previously demanded from the individual priestly 'shepherd', which, in turn, was linked to his estate ethics, to the structure of the pastoral event.

This also fundamentally changes the other two characteristics, 'individualization' and 'totality'. They certainly remain valid: the new pastoral loci, too, are, in principle, interested in each individual and in everything about each individual. But these two characteristics lose the ambivalent horizon of 'disciplining and surveying', which they had in the classic pastoral power and the agrarian shepherd metaphor. From demands made of others – everyone has to yield everything in the context of Church religion – they become demands made of the Church. They turn into the task of not avoiding anybody or any of their problems. From impositions made by the Church on to its members, they become impositions of the people on to the Church.

En Route to a New Social Formation of the Church

All future social forms of the Church will have to assume that the Church is no longer – and never will be again – the master over the motives of its members to participate. This is not only true of those 'new' places where this is obvious and already conceptual reality, but also of all those traditional ecclesiastic social forms where the tempting fiction of a self-evident Church and Christianity continues to be passed on.

In order to cope with this situation, the Catholic Church will have to revise fundamentally its managing instruments and thinking. To think

in a classic modern way in terms of social forms and of super- and subordination will no longer work. This (typically Catholic, typically modern) posture is only prolonging the fatal institutional and substantial fiction of self-evident ecclesiastic social forms, an attitude that stands in conceptual contradiction with the logics of their addressees. It would be more appropriate to the fluid reality of our time to think in situational terms, so through the double index of place and time, and to think also in terms of task-orientation and, on that basis, to develop flexible social forms through a process of open search and permanent evaluation.

This also demonstrates the need for fundamental transformation of all those conventional ecclesiastic social forms: the acknowledgement of the now structural selflessness of ecclesiastic pastoral power and of their risky and non-self-evident character. After all, the 'individualization of the outside' has long since taken place, including at and in those (only seemingly) old loci. Community is no longer a given. Nor is it in the religious field. It has to be constantly (re)built and (re)constituted.

The territorial, ecclesiastic organization at the parish level continues to be worth striving for. Yet, it is then turned into the key element of a selfless structure, through which the Christian message is offered, and this also goes to those places where the Church has definitively lost all community-building power. The theological term for this selfless offering of God's proximity in word and deed is 'grace'. The abiding tasks for the territorial parish would hence have to be reformulated through a theology of grace.

It would mean, above all, that the specific *charismatic richness of the territorial parish* would have to be released. The congregation should have the opportunity to realize what it has been given as a gift. Similarly, it should not have to realize what has not been given to it as a gift. Certainly, the congregation has two indispensable commitments, and they, too, are grounded in the theology of grace: the liturgy and the creative reaction to the specific 'signs of the times' on site. *Liturgy*, after all, is the central fulfilment of the Church in the theology of grace. It is the place where humans discreetly open up to each other in the face of God's eternal love. It is the humble and grateful celebration of God's effective grace. The '*signs of the times*', though, are the challenges with which the present confronts the People of God, and the responses which the People of God still have to develop on the basis of the Gospel. According to *Gaudium et Spes* 4, faith cannot be passed on without perceiving these challenges.

We are currently experiencing the beginning of the end of a centuries-old type of Church constitution. This means no less than the running-out of a phase in Church history, during which the Church possessed real sanctioning power with respect to religious, political, legal,

and social issues, and during which it projected its social formats necessarily as self-evident institutions.

The attempt to articulate new concepts, which allow the discerning of what is new in the processes of Church development, is only just starting. It is open-ended, and it will never be completed. In the Catholic Church, this attempt could begin by no longer misunderstanding the last Council as a reform council, but as a truly spiritual challenge with regard to Church formation. This challenge would then consist of trusting in the Vatican's conception of exposure rather than in Tridentine social technology: the Church does not lose itself in the outside; it discovers itself there because that is where it realizes whether, where, and how far its faith will carry (it).

"Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces."³⁸ Pope Francis writes this in *Evangelii Gaudium*. This is another way of articulating the 'pastoral conversion'³⁹ which awaits the Catholic Church.

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³⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223.

³⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27.

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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

PROJECTS

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

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The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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